



*Foehy sat on a great flat rock*

# JOTHY

*A Story of the South Indian Jungle*

BY

CHARLOTTE CHANDLER WYCKOFF  
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JOTHY

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*To*  
THE MEMORY OF  
J. H. W. AND G. C. W.







## FOREWORD

DEAR BOYS AND GIRLS:

When I was a little girl of five, I rode all night in a bullock-cart many times, with my father and mother, to visit some villages far out in the “cactus jungles” of South India. I walked along the edges of the rice fields, drank the sweet water of cocoanuts which friendly villagers got for me from the palms, camped in a tent under banyan trees and made friends with children like those you meet in this book. Now that I am grown-up I teach in a school like the one to which Jeeva and Jothy went, and I sometimes go back to visit the villages from which my children come.

You must realize that in South India we do not use the word "jungle" for a great wet forest such as Kipling describes. His stories are about the North, which is as different from the South as Montana is different from Florida. A jungle in South India is a dry wilderness of prickly-pear cactus, thorn bushes and spiky wild palms covering sandy plain or rocky hills. Jackals, snakes, and sometimes cheetahs, have these jungles to themselves until irrigation, in a year of good rains, pushes the boundaries of cultivation farther and farther out from a village at the center. When you ride through South India by train or motor, you will find the jungle-stretches alternating with the lush green of rice and other crops around villages.

Although India is only half the size of the United States, it contains three times as many people as there are in the United States. There are all sorts and kinds of people. As in every land, there are rich people and poor people, good people and selfish people. This story deals almost entirely with the poor people who are called in America by their old name, pariahs [*pron.* pa'-ree-ya, to rhyme with "carry a"]. In India the pariahs of the South are now called "Adi-Dravidas" or aboriginal Dravidians, for reasons which you may find in a history of India, but I have used the name which is familiar in the west. When you read this story, re-

member that I am writing about only a few people in one small corner of the province of Madras in South India — no more ! On a large map of South India you may find “Gingee,” which is the English form of “Senji,” about seventy miles inland from Madras. Any one of scores of villages in that region might serve as the original for “Karumboor.” Perhaps up to this time the name “India” has brought to your mind the Himalaya Mountains, the Ganges River, the Taj Mahal and other famous sights of the North. I hope that hereafter you will think also of the equally beautiful tropical India of the South — the land of rice fields and palm trees near the tip of the triangle.

I hope you will try to pronounce the Tamil words as indicated. Tamil, which means sweetness, is an ancient Dravidian language with a great literature. It was hoary with age when English was born, so treat it with respect ! You do not like to hear foreigners pronounce Chicago to rhyme with kick-a-goal, do you ? Nor do Indians like to hear you pronounce pariah to rhyme with Maria. The following rules have been followed in writing the Tamil names in English:

There are no flat a's. An “a” before two consonants is pronounced like “u” in “up,” as “Chandra” to rhyme with “tundra.” Otherwise “a” is broad as in Rama (Rah'ma).

U is pronounced "oo," as Sundari (Soon'-da-ree), Murugan (Moo'-roo-gun).

E is pronounced like long "a," as Jeyanoor (Jay'-a-noor), Chery (Chair'y).

One of the many Indian rules of courtesy is that one should never address one's elders, whether strangers or relatives or friends, by their names, even if they are only a year or two older. That is why Jothy uses the terms: "Big Brother," "Young Uncle," "Old Uncle," "Teacher," "Sister," with no name attached, except when necessary to avoid confusion. If you went to the Tamil country, every older person would call you "Little Brother" or "Little Sister" in friendly fashion, and you would call every older person "Father" or "Mother" or "Grandfather" or "Big Sister," according to age. Except in two cases, I have not troubled you with the Tamil names for different grades of relationship. Now I put my hands together, palms touching, fingers up, in the beautiful South Indian greeting which is like a prayer:

*Na'-mas-kah'ram !*

When you have entered Karumboor (Village of Sugar-Cane) and have enjoyed its hospitality, and the hospitality of Jeyanoor (Town of Victory), we bid you:

*"Poy'-too-vah'-room ! Go, and come again !"*

CHARLOTTE CHANDLER WYCKOFF



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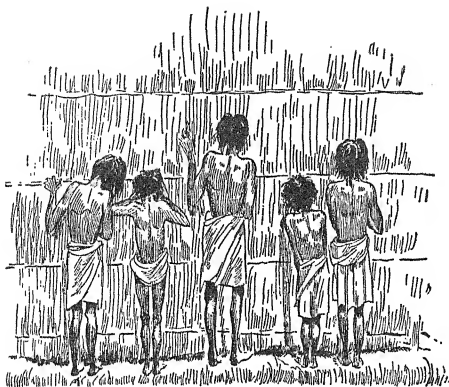


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## CHAPTER I

### *BLACKIE ATTENDS A WEDDING AND REBELS AGAINST FATE*

**B**LACKIE! BLACKIE! Wake up! The procession is starting!"

Blackie rolled over on the mud floor of the hut, rubbed her eyes open, then pillowed her cheek on her small brown hand, and closed them again. It could not be morning yet. Her brother leaned over and shook his eight-year-old sister vigorously.

"Wake up ! Don't you hear the drums beginning ? I have a fine place for us to watch the wedding — the ceremony, not just the processions. If you don't want to come —"

At the word "wedding" Blackie remembered, and sat up suddenly wide awake. No more thrilling events ever took place in Karumboor than weddings and this one would be especially magnificent, for the richest land-owner in the village was marrying his daughter to a rich land-owner from another village.

"I come ! I come, Big Brother !" she cried, scrambling to her feet and running after him. Her father and mother still lay asleep on their palm-leaf mats. Baby stirred and whimpered in his hammock which was a strip of cloth swung from a rafter. Grannie was already out in the starlight in front of the hut, tipping up a clay pot to rinse the charcoal from her mouth. The children did not stop to cleanse their teeth.

This wedding was almost as exciting as a wedding in one's own family for Blackie's ancestors for generations had been servants of this land-owner's ancestors, just as Blackie's whole family now worked for him. Of course, since the master's family were caste people of the Reddy caste, and Blackie's people were pariahs

or outcastes, they could not go inside the house or the wedding pavilion built in front of the house.

Blackie raced after her brother down the alley between the thatched-roof huts. She adored her brother, Raj, who was slender in build and as light brown in color as their mother and herself, not coal-black like her father whom she called "Nynah" as you call your father Daddy. The boy's slim, naked body flashed through the dusk ahead of her. It was not yet daylight. He untwisted his scanty turban as he ran and wrapped the cloth around his head and ears for the air was heavy with dew. Blackie followed his example, untying her scant yard of red homespun from her waist and pulling it over her tousled head.

"We'll go around to the back," decided Raj as they stood in the lane, bordered by dense cactus, which separated the Oor where the high caste and low caste people live in their various sections, from the Chery or slums where the outcastes live. "There's such a crowd in the main street that we can never get in that way."

"What are they doing now, Big Brother?" called Blackie, following him. The throbbing of tom-toms sent chills of ecstasy up and down her spine.

"Chee!" mocked Big Brother scornfully. "You went home and went to sleep and missed a lot!" He

plunged through the bushes at the end of the lane, taking a trodden path that led to the fields. As they came out on the edge of the rice fields, now fallow, the morning star lit up the roofs of the Oor beyond another cactus hedge that separated it from the field. Raj made his way around the outside of the hedge, stopping once with an exclamation to warn Blackie of a snake. They threw a pebble after the cobra to make it hurry out of their way, then went on. A cock crowed shrilly on the other side of the hedge. There was another orgy of drumming; a rocket shot up and burst against the star-lit sky.

"I saw the Reddy women march in a procession to the bridegroom's house," protested Blackie as they pulled aside withered thorn branches gingerly to find a gap in the cactus hedge. "Lakshmi was carrying a brass tray of cocoanuts and rock-candy, and her mother and aunts had trays of betel leaves and flowers."

"Silly!" interrupted Raj, as he made his way carefully through the tough, blue-green paddles of cactus which reached out to tear his bare skin with their wicked thorns. "They took those gifts for the ceremony of welcoming the bridegroom into their family. They put thick garlands of flowers around his neck

and escorted him back to their house with a wonderful procession. That's what went on after you left."

Blackie gasped as she stepped on a thorn, then she stood on one leg and tried to pull it out.

"Hurry up!" commanded her brother impatiently. "Pull out the thorn later. Lump-of-Dirt may not be able to keep the place for us. Run!"

Once through the thorn hedge they found themselves on the dump-heap at the back of the master's house. From within the walls arose sounds of great bustle and confusion as food for the great crowd of guests was prepared — whirring of hand mills and grindstones, pounding of pestles, shouting of orders. Blackie paused to sniff the delicious odors that arose, spicy odors that made her faint with hunger, but her brother hurried her around to the side where a group of small pariah boys and girls had climbed up to a narrow ledge and had torn peck-holes in the palm-leaf sides of the pavilion or pandal just where it joined the brick wall of the house.

"I want to see the procession!" whimpered Blackie, much disappointed that the masses of people in front of the pandal cut off all view of the street. The drums beat louder and louder. The pipes tootled a joyful

nuptial tune. Rockets flared up at intervals to scatter stars.

"Blockhead!" scolded her brother, boosting her to the ledge and climbing up himself. "In a minute the procession will be over. They're just escorting the bridegroom's party to the wedding. The groom himself came last night. Everything is going to happen right here inside the pandal. See! The Brahmin priest is ready and waiting!"

Blackie put her eye to the slit in the palm-leaf sides and found that she had a good view of the interior of the pandal. She had watched preparations for this wedding from afar, ever since the day when the Brahmin priest, with due ceremony, had planted the first bamboo pillar of the pandal on the east side where he now stood waiting for the pair. In the blinding flare of a gasoline light which hung from a rafter, she saw him pouring oil into the bowl of a tall brass lamp-stand—an expensive ceremonial oil called ghee, made from buffalo-milk. He shifted to one side two painted clay pots of cooked rice, to be thrown during the ceremony. The Brahmin was fair of skin and smooth-shaven, with only a single tuft of hair left on his bald head. The sacred thread of his caste hung from one shoulder and across his chest, only partly hidden by his

loose muslin loin-cloth and scarf. The trident of the god Vishnu was painted in vermilion and white on his forehead, and on the foreheads of all the men who crowded into the pavilion as the barbers' band came so close that the drumming nearly split one's ears.

"There's the master's daughter — Lakshmi !" called Blackie excitedly, her voice piping out in the sudden silence as the drums stopped. She pushed her head farther through the crack to single out the bride's little sister in the crowd of gaily-dressed women who surged into the pandal and sat down on the mats at one side. How beautiful Lakshmi looked, in an orange silk skirt with maroon border, and a black velvet jacket, and jewels. "How her ear-rings sparkle !"

"Keep quiet !" commanded Big Brother and her cousin, Lump-of-Dirt, pulling her back. "If you make a noise like that, they'll send us away and then we can't see anything. Don't let them see you, or you can't stay here."

"Look, Brother !" exclaimed Blackie, putting her eye to the crack again. "There's Murugan, the washer-man's son, inside the pandal, and there's the barber's daughter, Parvati. Why can't we go inside ? There's our teacher and his girl, Sundari. I'm going in to be with them."



Lump-of-Dirt grabbed her as she jumped to the ground and pulled her back roughly. "And do you think they'll let you in there?" he mocked, while Raj gave her a good slap and hoisted her up on the ledge again.

"I'll never bring you with me again!" muttered Raj crossly. "If you make any more trouble, you can go home."

"But why?" inquired Blackie tearfully. "Sundari lives in our Chery, and our father works for the master just as much as the washerman and the barber do—"

"Stupid! The washerman always goes to weddings with his whole family. He has to dye the wedding-cloths in saffron when the priest comes to bless them. Look! There comes the bridegroom in his yellow cloth! The barbers shave him and they do the drumming, that's why they come. Anyway they and the washermen are caste people, and we're not."

"And the teacher is a learned man," added Lump-of-Dirt. "Watch now! The bride is coming!"

Fascinated, they watched two men hold up a white cloth like a screen in front of the priest. The master and his wife approached from the door of the house, bringing with them their fifteen-year-old daughter,

Meena, clad in draperies of sacred yellow, her hair almost hidden under a cap of tiny yellow chrysanthemums which were braided all down her long pigtail. She hung her head modestly and had to be pushed and pulled by her mother and her attendant to her place on one side of the screen, while the groom pretended to be equally unwilling as he approached on the other side.

"Soon now they'll have a look at each other !" giggled Lump-of-Dirt, falling off the ledge with excitement and scrambling up again. "I wonder if he will like her. Good luck for us to see this part !"

The bride and groom now stood on opposite sides of the screen, under the drooping leaves of a plantain tree, with festoons of mango leaves all about them. The pandal was as bright as a bed of zinnias with the gorgeous silk turbans of the men and sarees or draped dresses of the women, and heavy with the scent of flowers and sandalwood and rosewater. The priest began to chant sentences in sonorous Sanskrit as he took a lighted twig and lit the wicks which were thrust like five tongues of flame from the brass bowl. The heads of the bride and groom hung lower, as their parents made the vows for them "by the god of fire." The tom-toms beat faster and louder as the auspicious mo-

ment approached when, at a signal, the screen was lowered and the priest handed to the bridegroom the yellow cord or tali which he tied around the bride's neck.

"Raj !" shouted a voice through the crowd outside, as the drums grew quiet again. "O-o-o-oh ! Raja !"

"What ?" replied the boy reluctantly, jumping to the ground. All the children slipped hastily down from their peek-hole as one of the Reddys called to the boy across the heads of the crowd.

"Get up the tree out there, and fetch us some more cocoanuts ! We need more !"

As the man disappeared the children climbed to their perch again. "They can wait !" muttered Raj, putting his eye to the hole. The singers had tuned up their fiddles and the drum and cymbals beat the rhythm of the marriage-song above the tom-toms and the talk of the crowd. "*Joy! Joy!*" they sang in a swelling chorus in which all joined. "*On this solemn and happy day, with holy joy, our Rama has married Seeta.*"

"But her name is Meena, not Seeta !" objected Blackie.

"Silly !" sniffed her brother. "Seeta is the goddess, wife of the god, Rama. Don't you know she followed

her husband to the forest? That's just a wedding-song. The bride must be like Seeta, always faithful."

It was wonderful to be married, Blackie thought, shifting her weight from one aching foot to the other on the narrow ledge, never tired of the festal scene in the brightly lighted pandal. Would she ever wear diamonds in her ears, like Meena, and a necklace of gold coins, and follow her husband nine times around the sacred fire as Meena was now doing, with a corner of her saree tied to her husband's saffron-dyed scarf? She spied her mother in the crowd that was pressed



back as the wedding-party came out of the pandal and ran across to stand beside her.

"When will I be married, Amma?" she asked timidly, using the Tamil name for mother.

"Listen to the child!" laughed her mother, pulling an end of her coarse, homespun saree around the naked baby on her hip. "You are not a Reddy, that you should have a grand wedding like this!"

"Back! Back, you pariahs!" shouted the master's brother angrily, as the crowd of guests surged out of the pandal. Blackie clung to Amma as they retreated almost to the dump-heap in the rear. "What's going to happen now?" she asked.

Amma pointed up to the seven stars of the constellation which Hindus call "The Heaven of the Seven Rishis," instead of "The Great Bear," for each star is named for one of the ancient sages called rishis. The stars hung low in the north, paling in the light of dawn. "See the double star?" she inquired. "That's a rishi and his faithful wife. The priest is asking the bride and groom to look at them and take them as their example, then they'll ride around the village in a procession again."

She sniffed the odors from the back courtyard with interest. "Curry is ready for the feast. By tonight they

will have fed everyone else and our turn will come."

"Amma !" said Blackie, as they made their way out through the gap in the cactus and around the edge of the Oor toward their own part of the village. "Why can Murugan and Parvati and even Sundari go inside the pandal and inside the Reddy's house, and we cannot ?"

Amma laughed as she handed Little Brother to Blackie and rolled her loosened black hair into a tight knot which she tucked in so that it bulged over one ear. "Listen to the child !" she exclaimed good-naturedly, hunting for green nelli-berries to stop the baby's hungry wails. "Will high caste people let us into their houses ? It was written on your forehead that you should be born a pariah, not a Reddy or a Brahmin or a potter. To each his work and to each his fate. Our fate is to toil and starve. It is written on Lakshmi's forehead that she should be born a high caste girl, daughter of the richest Reddy in Karumboor."

"Why ?" inquired Blackie, feeling of her head under her tangled mop of hair with one hand, while she held Baby Brother securely astride her hip with the other. "Where is it written ?"

Her mother laughed loudly, coming back to the path again. "Not on the skin, my little calf !" she explained,

popping a nelli-berry into each waiting mouth. "It's on the bone. When you go down to the river, look at the skulls near the burning-ghat. You can see the writing clearly."

"Is it written that I have a grand wedding too?" asked Blackie eagerly, as a fresh burst of tom-tomming made them hesitate and look back.

"Come on! They won't let us come near," said her mother resignedly, leading the way along the path. "They can feast and sit still but we must harvest the sugar-cane. A grand wedding for you, Little One?" she continued bitterly. "We borrowed only ten rupees for your sister's wedding, two years ago, but after all these months of toil that debt is yet unpaid. You are promised to my younger brother and my people are like us. Where can they find a silk cloth or even a pair of ear-rings to send you for the betrothal gift? No, you must be content with cotton cloth and metal ear-rings, like me. But, there will be a band and a procession!"

Blackie stamped her foot and pouted. "I want a grand wedding," she whimpered, "with diamond ear-rings and a gold coin necklace—"

"But think, heart's jewel!" said her mother, turning

back to rescue the baby from her vehemence. "They say poor Meena has a mother-in-law who will make her life a burden. If you go to live with my people in Chinna-chery, they will be kind to you, and you will be near me. But wherefore all these tears when you are no higher than a calf as yet? Stop crying, silly girl! Perhaps you will go to school, as the teacher says. There is Jeeva of Chinna-chery who is quite old, and not married yet. I remember when you were born at my father's house, she lived next door. She used to carry you about on her hip, and still she goes to school!"

"Hi-yi!" shouted a familiar voice above them, and a cocoanut fell at their feet. They looked up to see Raj sliding backwards down the slender, curving trunk of a palm. He paused halfway down to rest with the soles of his bare feet against the trunk and his back leaning against the broad belt that held him to the tree. "I climbed a tree near the master's house first," he called gleefully, "and I saw everything in the back courtyard without their knowing it! There were three *enormous* copper pots of rice on the fire, and the Reddy grandmother—" He laughed till he nearly fell from his perch. "She was in a real rage, scolding all those



hired Reddy servants and ordering everyone about ! What fun ! I'll hear more when I take the cocoanuts in."

When they reached the hut, Nynah split the young cocoanut open at one end with his short-handled scythe, and Blackie tipped it up so that the sweet water ran into Baby's mouth, but he did not like it, so she finished it, then scraped out all the milky pulp to eat. She ate what was left in the porridge-pot, and then ran off to the Oor to follow the tom-toms, while Nynah and Amma trudged away to the sugar-cane harvest and Raj drove the master's cattle to pasture.

All day long an inexhaustible supply of food poured out from the master's house to all who asked for it until, in the afternoon, Grannie carried home a pot full of white rice and curry-sauce for their share in the feast. They sat in silence around the hut, enjoying each delicious mouthful—rolling each cardamon and each red pepper under their tongues, till the pungency brought tears to their eyes—licking the last traces of sauce from each finger, in deep, well-filled content.

"The Reddy grandmother," said Raj, with a deep sigh, sniffing the spicy odor of his hand even after he had washed it, "the Reddy grandmother may be a scold, but she knows the way to mix the curry spices !"

"Why — ?" began Blackie, but Grannie was in no mood for her eternal questions.

"Now you are full of rice for once, keep your mouth tight shut !" she said tartly, collecting up their leaf plates to throw out. "White rice for the fair-skinned caste people; black millet for us black folks; that's our fate."



## CHAPTER II

### *BLACKIE CELEBRATES THE FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS BY CHOOSING A NEW NAME*

THE REDDY grandmother, as everyone called the mother of Rama Reddy, master of Blackie's family, was the greatest scold in the village. She not only ruled her blind old husband, her sons and their wives and children and dependents, but kept everyone in fear of her sharp tongue. Blackie had a taste of her wrath a week after the wedding, on the morning of the South Indian Festival of Lights.

She and Sundari and Poopathy were making tiny flower-dolls under the portia tree in the lane, near Sundari's house at the entrance to the Chery. They took bell-shaped portia blossoms and turned them upside down so that their petals flared like beautiful silk skirts of yellow tinged with red. With broom-straws they fastened to the top of the calyx the cup or calyx of another flower turned on its side, so that the inner surface of the seed-box represented the face, and the long feathery pistil hung down like a pigtail at the back. Broom-straws also fastened other pistils at either side for arms. Often they stopped to roll up the heart-shaped portia leaves and blow through them for they make fine whistles. The boy dolls had broom-straw feet beneath their shortened skirts and stood propped in little ridges of the thick, yellow dust. It helped to make the excitement and fun of that festal week last a little longer, to play it all over again with the dolls. Sundari, however, was becoming unbearably officious.

"I was in the pandal and you weren't," she reminded the other two, whenever a doubt arose. "I stood with my Nynah in the front of the crowd at the procession and I saw everything, so I know what to do!"

Blackie and Poopathy submitted meekly to her dictates, but it rankled a little to be patronized by one

whose home was a thatched hut in the Chery, although it fronted on the lane and stood at a little distance from the other Chery houses. Sundari's father had been a pariah in another village until he became a learned man who could read books, and came here to teach the Chery people at their own request. No doubt Sundari had one small pair of ear-rings in her ears and always wore clean cotton skirts and jackets, but she was not as finely dressed as even the poor washerman's or potter's girls on a festival day. Just at this moment, along came the master's daughter, Lakshmi, herself.

"Oh, Lakshmi !" exclaimed Blackie joyously, "you're all dressed up for the festival ! You've got on your wedding jacket and jewels !"

Lakshmi stood uncertainly in the lane, looking at their dolls, as Sundari marshalled them in line for the procession.

"Are those cakes for the festival ?" inquired Poo-path, looking hungrily at the bundle which Lakshmi held, wrapped in a fringed towel. "Did your mother make cakes ? Give me one ?"

Lakshmi thrust the bundle out of sight behind her back with a pout. "I won't ! You must not look at it or it will be polluted. I'm taking it to my father in the sugar-cane field."

"What did you do for the festival today?" inquired Poopathy, with envy written all over her black, pock-marked little face as she glanced from Lakshmi's gorgeous silk to her own ragged red calico.

"We got up when the first cock crowed," responded Lakshmi complacently, jingling the glass bangles on her slender wrist. "We washed our hair and rubbed ourselves with oil, and dressed and took half the cakes to the temple for the god, and ate the rest. It's terribly dull at our house now the wedding's over and Meena has gone," she confided. "I have no one to play with. Of course, Meena was fifteen and I'm eleven, but we — we — always —" Tears threatened the circles of black cosmetic which made her eyes so big and bright. Blackie shot a look of compassion at her friend — for she and Lakshmi often met secretly outside the village to talk, though Lakshmi was two or three years older.

"Sundari has the procession all wrong!" said Blackie, pushing her hair out of her sparkling eyes and running to the cactus hedge to pull out a piece of board which she kept hidden there to prevent it from vanishing into someone's fire-place. "Come on, Lakshmi! Show us what to do! I'll be the drums and you can be the pipe, but whatever shall we do for rockets?"

She sat down and propped the board against one knee which thrust through the gap where her scant length of homespun scarcely met when tied around her waist. On this she drummed a rhythmical beat—once with the flat of her wrist and twice with her fingertips, *rump-tee-dee, rump-tee-dee*, using her voice for the nasal whine of a flute. Lakshmi produced rockets by bursting yellow tecoma-buds against her forehead with loud pops, till the round black caste-mark between her eyes was quite smudged out, and every tecoma bush in the lane was stripped of buds. When they tired of a wedding, they started a funeral. Poo-pathy ran off to bring live embers from her home to light the funeral pyre on which they laid the dead flower-doll. Sundari had now to yield her leadership to Lakshmi, not only because she was older but because she knew these ceremonies from the inside. Before the funeral could start, however, the rumpus began.

Blackie had just been comparing her dirty little brown hand with Lakshmi's dainty, henna-tipped fingers and buff skin. "Black tamarind with green chilis!" she laughed good-naturedly. "Black tamarind and green chilis together!"

"Black tamarinds and green chilis, is it?" scolded an angry voice just behind them. The girls sprang to



*"Black tamarinds and green chilis, is it?"*





their feet guiltily to find the Reddy grandmother advancing down the lane, her wrinkled face distorted with wrath. She seized Lakshmi and pulled her away from the others, then shook and slapped her, her voice growing shriller and shriller with rage until the few people left in the Chery came running out to see what was the matter. Sundari's father, the teacher, stood on the porch of his house near by.

"Here it is past noon," shrieked the old lady, "and you have not taken my son his food yet! Is it not enough that you leave him hungry, but you must smirch your loveliness by playing with these pigs? They have rubbed the sacred caste-mark from your forehead—aiyo, alas!" she wailed, turning the child's face up to hers. "Dirty pariah dogs!"

"We're *not* dogs!" retorted Sundari furiously from where she and Blackie still stood under the portia tree. "We never touched her forehead. I never asked her to play. She just came. I never touched her!" Blackie stared at Sundari in amazement as she burst into tears of rage and ran to fling herself into her father's arms as he approached. She had heard bad names so often that she thought nothing of them. Why should Sundari get so excited?

"Talk back to me, will you?" the great lady was

saying, looking like a queen in her handsome red silk saree and massive gold ornaments. "What have you done with my son's food which I prepared with my own hands ? You've eaten it, I suppose !"

Sundari flung herself forward, breast still heaving, and pointed at the neglected bundle which Lakshmi had tossed into the shade of the cactus hedge when she joined the game. Her father pulled her back before she could seize it and throw it at the woman. "I'm *not* a pariah dog !" she sobbed afresh. "I'm a Christian. I'm as good as Lakshmi !"

The offended Reddy lady marched up the lane, the bundle held in one hand while she pulled her granddaughter along by the other. She turned around for a last retort to the assembled pariahs, those too weak or too old to be at work, who stood beside Sundari and her father.

"You are, are you ?" she scoffed. "Have you heard how Thennal Raman, the wise fool, answered the king when he tried to make the barber a Brahmin ? He took a black dog into the lake and scrubbed it all day long. When the king said to his jester, 'Fool, what are you trying to do ?' Thennal Raman said, 'If you can make a low caste man into a Brahmin, I can make this black dog white !' "

The pariahs chuckled at this thrust, shrugged their shoulders and turned back to their huts as the old lady disappeared. Blackie's grannie had to imitate Lakshmi's, of course, but Blackie was skilled in dodging slaps and cuffs.

"Don't hit her, Old One !" begged Sundari's father, of whom the Chery people were still a little in awe, for he could read books and teach them of the new religion which they called the Christian Way. Each night they helped him to build their school a little nearer completion and listened to the stories and songs which he taught them. He wore a gray cotton coat, like men of the town, and his loin-cloth hung to his ankles like the loin-cloths of the caste men. He talked boldly to the masters in the Oor and even reasoned with them when they were unjust to their servants. They, too, respected him for his learning, although he had been born a pariah.

"What is your name, child ?" the teacher asked, and when she had told him, "Blackie ? You ought to get a name with a meaning. Sundari means Beauty, and Kamala means Lotus, and Poopathy means Flower. Blackie is no name for you. You are not black. You'd be quite fair and pretty if you'd wash yourself."

Grannie pulled an end of her ragged cloth over her

unkempt gray locks and looked nervously behind her. The devils that lurk in the trees waiting to harm pretty children might hear these imprudent words and have their attention drawn to Blackie.

"I beg you, Sir," she quavered, "do not bring the Evil Eye upon her with your praise in this open place. We have lost three little ones," she added, wiping her eyes with a corner of her cloth, "because the evil spirits noticed them. This one," and now she seized Blackie and shook her to emphasize every word, "is black and very ugly and no one wants her. She's a bad, naughty girl! Lazy, idle wretch, to sit here playing all morning! How can we boil the porridge when your mother brings home the millet, unless you collect manure and straw for fuel-cakes? Off with you!" And she released the child with a push.

"Wait!" The teacher seized Blackie by the arm before she could escape. "If you will keep yourself clean and come to school to learn to read, the caste people will not call you bad names," he admonished, while she squirmed and wriggled. This man was forever talking about school. What did she care about school when she felt faint with hunger and longed to go foraging in the nelli-bushes and under the jambolam tree for something to eat? "And choose a good name," he

was saying. "Stop struggling, you wild little jungle child. A name that will give you something to live up to !" She bounded away as he let her go.

AT SUNSET that evening she was toiling back from the pariahs' water-hole with the fretting baby on one hip and a small clay pot of vile-smelling water on the other. She looked up eagerly at the clouds that covered the setting sun like ashes over flame. Would it rain for this festival night as the wise men said it should ? There was not water enough to last much longer, nor a mouthful of green for the starved beasts. The earth was scorched brown with drought. As she neared the village a woman detached herself from the long line of weary coolies who plodded home, as uncomplaining as the thin, humped oxen which the ploughmen drove in pairs. Blackie recognized her mother, and shouted to her joyously, running to give her the wailing infant, and to take the length of sugar-cane which her mother held out to her.

"Amma !" Blackie called, chewing and spitting the cane busily, as they entered the Chery. "The teacher says I must have a new name, then the Reddy grandmother won't call us pariah-dogs any more. And, Amma," she chattered on, following her mother up the

street, "tonight is the Festival of Lights. Poopathy says they are going to put five lights in front of their house, and Lakshmi says they are lighting two hundred at the master's house. Couldn't we light just two or three? They would make our house so beautiful!"

"Listen to the child!" laughed Amma, a little bitterly, as they reached their door. "Where should we get so much oil? The child wants lights for the festival," she remarked to Nynah who squatted outside the hut. She handed him the baby, took the pot of



water from Blackie and went inside to put it on the fire. While Grannie blew the wisps of fuel into flame under the pot, Amma loosened the fold of her cotton saree around her waist and dumped out the day's wage of grain for them all into a hole in the center of the mud floor of the hut. With her long wooden pestle thump-thumping against the stone at the bottom of the hole, she began pounding the husks off the coarse black millet, while Blackie sat between her father's knees in the dusk and told him all the day's news.

"The teacher wants me to get a new name too," said Nynah, a bit sheepishly, as he pinched her cheeks. No one could remember that he had ever had any name but Mottai — Bald-head. For he kept closely cropped the little hair that he had instead of leaving it to grow long enough to twist into a knot under his turban, as did his son and the other men and boys. "You must do as the teacher says, Little One," he advised. "He will lead us into something better. God knows I am in trouble enough, with the master pressing me for that debt, and the crops drying up without water."

But Blackie heard no more, for the children shouted from the end of the street that the lights were being lighted, and she raced off after Raj. In the lane he stopped for a moment. "What's this about your talk-



ing back to the Reddy lady ?” he inquired sternly. Not heeding her protests he gave her a resounding slap. “Take that for your boldness ! Aren’t we having enough trouble with the master about the debt ? Did Nynah tell you ? Tomorrow you are to drive the cattle to pasture instead of me. Hear that ? I shall work in the fields with the men hereafter.”

But Blackie had no thoughts for the morrow now. She ran excitedly into the group of villagers who stood watching the horizon. Shifting masses of cloud were touched at the edges with delicate rose and amber, green and lavender; then the afterglow faded into dull gray against deep blue.

“I tell you, it never fails !” the Oldest One was declaring, shaking his stick at the circle about him. “When the sacred fire springs into flame by the hand of the gods in the temple of the Holy Mount, at that very instant the beacon at the top of the Mount must be lighted. If they fail by a second, the gods will be angry and the Rains will fail —”

“And we must starve !” concluded another bitterly.

“Why ?” inquired Blackie, pushing herself into the group. “Why, Grandfather ?”

“Why ? Why ? Why ?” jeered the men till Blackie, much abashed, crept away by herself. She

wished someone would answer her questions, but they rarely did.

The fields and the distant hills were blotted out by darkness. Every time Blackie rubbed her eyes and blinked, a hundred stars twinkled into view. Drums began to beat in the distance — probably at the temple in the Oor. Their rhythmic throb set Blackie's pulses to bounding with the expectancy that something was going to happen. Far down on the horizon gleamed a new yellow star. There was a shout from the crowd, "That's it ! The light on the Sacred Mount !" It was not a star but a beacon-fire. The lights blossomed on one hill after another as far as the eye could see. Yellow and brighter than the stars, they flickered in the gathering darkness.

"Oh !" breathed a voice at Blackie's elbow. It must be the teacher's son, Dahveedu, for no other boy in the Chery wore a shirt, yet Dahveedu never held off from the other boys as Sundari often did from the girls. "O—o-o-oh !" he sighed. "How beautiful ! *Jothy natchathira yerunthana vanay—the stars show their light overhead.*"

"What ?" queried Blackie curiously. "What did you say ?"

The boy seemed startled to find someone near him.

"Nothing," he retorted sulkily, walking off, but Blackie trailed after him.

"You said *Jothy* which is the name of the blacksmith's daughter-in-law, and you said *na-chath'iram*," she persisted.

"Donkey!" teased Dahveedu, his teeth gleaming through the darkness. "The blacksmith's daughter-in-law! Of course, millions of people have that name, my uncle's daughter, too. Don't you know anything, you jungle child? I said some words of a song."

"Sing it!" begged Blackie, but Dahveedu shook his head.

"*Jothy* is the poetry name for light," he informed her wisely, scanning the horizon again. "There!" he instructed her further, stabbing a forefinger in the direction of one hill after another. "That is *jothy* and that — and that — And Oo-oo-oo, look!" They both stared at a new bonfire whose glow deepened until the hill in front of it stood out in jagged black outline, its own tiny light swallowed up in the mighty fire behind. Blackie clutched the boy in sudden alarm, her heart throbbing in her throat. "Is it — is it — the sacred fire?" she gasped, burying her face on his shoulder. Dahveedu wrenched himself away with a sudden shout of laughter.

"The moon !" he mocked loudly. "The moon ! She's afraid of the moon !"

For a moment or two after Dahveedu had run off, Blackie stood watching the huge round lantern rise, balance on the peak of the hill, and slide off into a small black cloud. *Jothy!* She whispered the word with a strange new throb in her breast, then turned around to find herself alone in the darkness. She fled down the lane, clapping her hands to frighten snakes. It was not the snakes she most feared but the devils which might jump out from that margosa tree and catch her. There ! She was safely past !

Near the Oor she met the children returning.

"Go and look, Blackie !" they cried. "Why didn't you come ?"

She crept into the main street of the Oor, slinking along in the shadow of a mud wall, then stuck her head out so that she could see. Oh, *jothy, jothy, jothy!* Every house down the street was ablaze with lights. On the porches, on the steps, in all the triangular niches that framed the doors and windows, along the tops of courtyard walls, twinkled myriads of lights. There must be hundreds and hundreds of tiny clay saucers, each with a wick floating in plenty of castor-oil. What richness ! What loveliness ! She gazed and gazed,

creeping farther and farther out from the shadows till one of the caste children playing in the street caught sight of her. "Black-ie ! Black-ie !" he taunted.

Myriad lights danced before her eyes in the darkness as she ran away. Over her head gleamed the glory of a nightly Festival of Lights, but she did not look up. The alleys of the Chery were dark, except in the leather-workers' street where a few lights twinkled on Poo-pathy's doorstep. The leather-workers held themselves a little apart from the other Chery people, and imitated the Oor when they could. Shivering with awe and loneliness and the dewy damp, Blackie burst open the rough bamboo door and dove into the snug, smoky warmth of her home. Amma looked around, smiling, from the corner where she squatted by the porridge pot, stirring it. After one glance around, Blackie realized why the hut seemed so crowded tonight. Besides Grannie and Raj and Amma and Nynah and Baby and herself, there was the new teacher seated in honor on one of the palm-leaf mats.

"The teacher says you and Raj must come to school from tomorrow," Amma announced. "Soon you will both be very, very wise !"

"But the master insists that the girl herd cattle to

help pay interest on my debt," protested Nynah dully, drawing Blackie down between his knees on the floor, and rumpling her hair. "The boy has to help his uncle and me with the water-lifting and ploughing."

"We have no time for books," asserted Raj loftily. "Am I a Brahmin, that I should read a strip of palm-leaf? As for Blackie, *How will learning help a woman to blow the fire?*"

Grannie cackled appreciatively at the proverb as she pulled the boy's shoulders against her humped-up knee and commenced to yank a rough wooden comb through his dusty hair. "Her job is to collect manure and straw and keep the cattle out of the millet field," she added. "As for your constant talk of being clean—get us a good well for the Chery from the Government, and then we'll be clean. Pah! How the water smells!"

The teacher rose and stooped to go out of the doorway, which seemed lower as he stood in it. "School at dawn!" he repeated good-naturedly. "You can go to your work a little later. Bring me a good name to write down in the book, Little One!" He was gone.

When the porridge was eaten and the family sprawled about on the floor, Blackie still sat doubled up against the mud wall with her chin on her knee,

seeing again in the embers of the fire the dancing of the many lights. Nynah snored loudly beside her, his face covered with his dingy turban-cloth.

"Amma !" she said suddenly, lying down and snuggling up against her mother. "My name is Jothy — not Blackie, but Jothy !"

"Hm !" grunted Raj, drowsily. "What a name for a dirty one like you !"

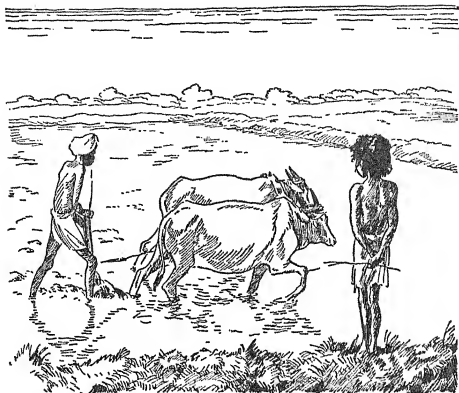
Amma cuddled her little girl close to her on one side and her boy on the other and kissed them again and again, now that they were safely hidden from the view of the jealous devils outside in the dark. "My sugar ! My precious eye ! My beautiful little calf !" she murmured passionately to each one in turn.

Grannie cackled again in her corner. "*Even the crow thinks that her chick is a gold chick !*" she quoted ironically. "So Blackie is not a good name for our little crow ?"

"She shall be 'Jothy' if she likes !" Amma retorted soothingly, stroking the hair off the child's forehead, and lowering her voice to a monotonous sort of chant. "Do you think she has nothing better to do — my darling — than to drive goats and collect manure ? I have been out in the world and I know — I know — You shall both learn and learn —"

But the children were already fast asleep. They never even woke when, toward morning, the Rains broke, and the world outside was rocked with storm and thunder. Sheets of water poured down upon the thirsty earth and put out all the festival fires on hill and doorstep, but that night they never touched the new little Jothy, asleep in Bald-head's hut.





### CHAPTER III

#### *JOTHY HAS A NUMBER OF BRAND-NEW EXPERIENCES*

SCHOOL did not begin the next morning after all, nor did Jothy take the goats to pasture. Rain poured down steadily all day. Since there could be no field-work they all sat in the hut except Raj who ran off gleefully to feed the animals at the master's house. Jothy wished that she were a boy so that she could splash through the puddles too, instead of having to sit still while Grannie combed her thatch of hair and

Amma tried to stretch the holes in her ear-lobes with larger wads of cloth.

"You talk of wearing diamond ear-rings !" exclaimed her mother, as she squirmed away from these painful attentions. "How do you think you can ever wear anything bigger than a broom-straw in your ears if you won't sit still ?"

At the thought of Lakshmi's dangling ear-drops with ruby centers, Jothy sat still and endured the discomfort of having her broom-straws replaced by larger sticks wound with cloth. Later she would have iron rings, like Amma's.

"Parvati's baby sister had the ear-piercing ceremony the other day," she remarked. "Sundari and I peeked in and saw the whole thing."

When the rain stopped for a little while at noon she rushed out to play with the other children in the strange gray twilight. They waded joyously through the new river that flowed where the lane had been, and searched through the damp soil for the velvet poochies, common little brown beetles which, in the Rains, put on splendid coats of scarlet. New lakes had appeared over night, as far as the eye could see. A flock of brown ducks swam happily in the very spot from which Jothy and Dahvedu had watched the lights only last night.

Hundreds of frogs and crickets croaked and chirped their content. The men were digging trenches around the outside of the huts to carry off the water. The earth smelled fresh — washed clean of litter and filth.

"A good rain, praise God!" exclaimed Mottai, straightening up for a moment with his short-handled spade in his hand.

"A good rain!" nodded the neighbors.

"No thanks to *you*, Mottai!" scolded the pariah priestess who swept the mud off the stone platform under the sacred peepul tree in the center of the Chery, and laid tecoma and portia blossoms before the gods of rough black stone that stood upon it. "You and your family have brought no offerings for the last month. Take care how you anger the gods by running off after the new Way!"

"What have your gods done for me?" retorted Mottai mildly, stooping to dig again.

The priestess shook her finger at him. "Take care!" she warned, her angry voice rising to a shriek. "The gods are angry. They will send a devil into the bodies of the children to make them ill. You will see!"

Grannie was so much frightened by this threat that she mixed yellow turmeric-water with slaked lime and

sprinkled it in a circle around the children to ward off evil spirits. It was fun for a while to have the rain pour down outside while they sat cosily in the hut munching sugar-cane which Raj had pilfered from the master's pile. Grannie could keep them amused for hours with stories of the famous jester, Thennal Raman, who outwitted kings and sages and rogues by his clever stratagems. After a time, however, they were very uncomfortable, for their mud floor became a puddle as water seeped in at the doorway and dripped from a leak in the roof.

They had no fuel for a fire except the tattered palm-leaf mats and Jothy's precious "drum." These were so damp that, although they blew and blew till their lungs ached, they could get only a cloud of smoke and no warmth. Baby coughed and wailed all night in his mother's arms. Jothy shivered till her bones ached, though she slept in snatches on her father's knees with his one cotton cloth wrapped around her. By the end of the next day of incessant rain she was one ache from head to foot, burning at one moment and shivering the next. She refused the raw grain and the sugar-cane which were all that they had to offer her. She was too wretched to lift her head, even during the commotion

that ensued when first a large black scorpion and then a cobra took refuge from the rain in the thatch of their roof.

"Gently ! Do not hurt them !" she heard Grannie warning Raj, as he tried to drive them away with his stick. "They have life to cherish, even as you !"

Raj begged a small pot of rice-water from the master's wife as she was about to pour it out for the cows, but Jothy would not touch it. She moaned and coughed and turned her head from side to side. Grannie went out into the rain to collect healing margosa leaves to scatter about her. "The fever will wax strong till the dark of the Moon," she prophesied, shaking her head gloomily, "and then it will wane, if God will."

At some time in the night Jothy woke to hear her mother wailing, "The baby is possessed of a devil ! He is stiff and does not breathe ! He looks just as my other little ones did. He'll die too !"

"The curse of the gods !" Grannie's voice was shrill with fear. "Get up, stupid, and take the porridge to the shrine ! Take your wife's ear-rings and make a vow to give the gods a gift if your child recovers. Pledge the child's hair. Do something quick !"

Jothy felt the chill damp of the floor through every bone of her body as her father laid her down. Her

breath came in painful gasps. A shower of water descended upon her head as the rain broke through a new hole in the thatch.

"No, no !" she heard her mother sobbing, as though far away. "What good did that do before? What we have begun we must finish. Call the teacher to pray to the new God."

Jothy knew no more after that but troubled dreams till she awoke, warm and dry, to find herself in Sundari's house, with Sundari's mother forcing hot gruel between her lips. She gulped it greedily, but choked down the very bitter medicine that followed with a wry face. How did she get here, she wondered drowsily, squirming around to find that Baby was asleep beside her under the same — could it be ? Yes, it actually was — a warm, woolly blanket. She had never in her life slept under a blanket. "Amma !" she whimpered.

"Go to sleep !" urged the teacher's wife, squatting over the fire-place in the corner to stir something that smelled good. "The rain has stopped and they have all gone to build up your house again. It fell down yesterday."

Jothy cuddled under the wonderful warm blanket with an arm about Little Brother, and sank into a dreamless sleep.

"Yes, a good rain, praise God !" repeated Nynah, a week later, as Jothy followed him out to the fields at dawn when one flaming star overhead lit an answering gleam in a hundred new pools on the vast, dark plain. Nynah carried a wooden plough over his shoulders and drove before him a pair of the master's white, humped bulls. "The wells are filling up. With a few showers from time to time, there will be good crops. If the master has good crops, we shall all have work and food."

"Nynah, must I go to school ?" pouted Jothy, who still felt languid and cross after her illness.

Nynah fastened his plough to the oxen's yoke. "Whatever the teacher says, you do, Little One," he said solemnly. "If he had not come, you and the baby would have died." At the memory his voice broke and he rubbed the back of his hand across his eyes. "Ah, what a sickness was in you for three days and nights ! But he prayed and God drove out the evil spirit. They sheltered us in their own house and gave us food. In all the rain he walked to the Iron Path and rode to the Junction to bring you medicine from the Government dispensary."

"Sing, Nynah !" interrupted Jothy, who had heard

this tale a dozen times already. "Sing the ploughing-song."

Nynah stepped down ankle-deep into the mud and seized the handle of the plough, poking first one bull and then the other with his stick. He pressed the wooden ploughshare into the slime and went off to the other end of the field and back again, grunting at his oxen. "Have I time for songs?" he grumbled to Jothy who stood waiting on the ridge between the paddy fields. "The sun will soon be hot and there are three more fields to plough." Nevertheless, after many starts and stops, he broke forth into the love-song with which his fathers had cheered their oxen through the mud of the rice fields for generations. No written music can capture the quaint, quavering melody, any more than our choppy English can give an idea of the liquid flow of the Tamil, but it was something like this:

*My sturdy bulls march up and down,*

*Toil-comrades in the paddy!*

*West of the Oor I met a maid*

*Who, cow-like, in the meadows strayed —*

*The fields lay green, the fields lay brown —*

*Hark, oxen, to my song!*



*Silver anklets grace her feet —  
Toil-comrades in the paddy !  
She stains her lovely teeth with red.  
I call. She turns aside her head —  
No heron is more slim nor sweet —  
Hark, oxen, to my song !*

*She peddled rice-cakes at my door,  
Toil-comrades in the paddy !  
We wandered to the Milkweed Hill  
Our hands with lovely blooms to fill,  
But now I am alone once more —  
Hark, oxen, to my song !*

*A bird behind the temple-tower —  
Toil-comrades in the paddy !  
Flies to its nest on yonder peak.  
There she and I a home may seek.  
Lord Siva send us marriage-dower !  
Hark, oxen, to my song !*

Before the song was finished Jothy heard Raj whooping her name far across the fields, but she did not answer because he called her "Blackie." She zigzagged back along the ridges while the blurred landscape came slowly into focus as the sun rose. How fresh and clean

the earth smelled ! She wriggled her toes in the soft clay and took great breaths of the cool air. Old Uncle was ploughing with a pair of the master's water-buffaloes that sank knee-high in the mud. He sang snatches of the same song as his brother, as he struggled along behind them:

*The morning-star blooms overhead,  
Toil-comrades of the paddy !  
She's lovely as the champak flower,  
She's luscious as the jambolam !  
She wears new cloth, all dotted red —  
Hark, oxen, to my song !*

At this point Jothy's dawn-dreams were rudely shattered by Raj who seized her from behind and dragged her off to school. They found ten or twelve children standing in a line on the low mud porch of the teacher's house, for the walls of the new school had melted completely away in the rain. The teacher was seated on a stool before them, looking very severe in a coat and turban, with steel spectacles on his nose. Jothy's cousin, the small urchin who went by the name of Lump-of-Dirt, was holding a lantern with a blackened chimney close to the teacher's head so that he could see to write in a big book which he held on his knee.

"Your name ?" he demanded, when the little girl appeared.

"Blackie, daughter of Mottai," answered Raj for her officiously.

"*Not* Blackie. Jothy !" insisted his sister.

"Jothy," agreed the teacher, making marks in the book. "Age ?"

She shook her head blankly.

"Go home and ask your mother when you were born ; Raj too," he directed.

Amma, intercepted halfway to the fields, scratched her head and wrinkled her brow for a long time in an effort to remember. "The boy was born soon after the great, great wind that blew down the jambolam tree by the Oor," she told them finally. "The next year the second boy was born, at Pongal festival, but he died, and then another Pongal came and half a year passed and the girl was born."

When they returned with this news the school-master was dumping dry river-sand in front of each of the line of children who now sat on the floor with their bare little backs against the wall. "Then Raj is eleven and Jothy is eight !" he announced, making more marks in his book and putting his pen behind his ear. "Smooth out your sand, all of you, and write with your

forefinger just as I do. Ah !” He took some sort of white stone out of his coat-pocket and made a curly mark on the floor. “Ah !” he said again. “That is *Ah !*”

Jothy made marks in the sand and rubbed them out. She ah-ed and ee-ed and oo-ed again and again until she was tired, without seeing any sense in it at all. Her muscles twitched with longing to move. She dug her elbow into Lump-of-Dirt who pinched her till she jumped up with squeals and giggles. The teacher put his hand on her head and pushed her firmly down into her place again.

“Sit still, wild little jungle child !” he commanded. “When you write Ah and Ee correctly, I’ll tell you a story.”

Poopathy was standing out in front, looking wistfully at the school. Jothy beckoned to her, but she shook her head. “My father says that learning is not for girls,” she called. The teacher heard her and summoned Sundari from the house.

“Show them how a girl can read, Sundari,” he suggested.

Sundari opened her book and flicked over the pages with great self-importance. The children gathered around with mouths open in astonishment to hear her

gabble a long stream of words with her eyes on the page. Jothy was bored. She gazed longingly after Poopathy who had strolled down the lane where the early morning sunlight, slanting through the portia trees, patterned the ground with mottled shadows. Jothy escaped part way down the steps once, trying to follow a flock of crows that flapped past with loud caws, but the teacher's long arm snatched her back and stood her in line again for her first lesson in Tamil poetry. Every line of poetry in that ancient language is made to be sung or chanted:

*Never cease learning every day that you live !*

*Never slander anyone so long as you live !*

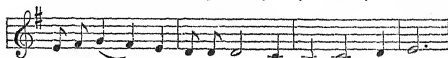
*The mother who bore you, oh, never forget !*

*Gratitude, too, for kindness shown, oh, never forget !*

chanted the children after the teacher, over and over, as raucously as crows cawing. The tune of that first lesson is something like this:



Ne - ver cease learn - ing ev - 'ry day that you live !



Ne - ver slan - der an - y - one so long as you live !



There is no telling how long they might have had to stand there with their arms folded on their chests, if the master had not appeared in the lane, with Lakshmi clinging to his hand. Rama Reddy, Lakshmi's father, was a tall, dignified man with light brown skin and fine features. Evidently he was just back from his morning bath and prayers at the river, for his white loin-cloth and turban were spotless, and the trident of Vishnu, whom he worshipped, was marked freshly on his forehead with vermilion and white paint. A dark red scarf was flung about his shoulders.

"The poetical precepts of the poetess Avvai for pariahs?" he called sarcastically to the teacher, standing at a distance. "What about the work to be done?"

Raj leaned over and nudged Jothy. "I know why he's cross! The teacher found out that he cheated Nynah about his debt!"

"Say *namaskaram* when your elders approach!" commanded the teacher sharply, making them put the palms of their hands together in the polite gesture of

greeting. "You agreed that I might keep them for an hour after sunrise, Sir," he said to the Reddy, with his own hands clasped.

Without further dismissal the children tumbled over one another down the steps. "School again tonight, remember!" the teacher called after them. The Reddy stopped Raj with a wave of his hand and Jothy stood beside him, gazing with open admiration at Lakshmi's black and yellow skirt and gold chain. The master still stared quizzically from the teacher to the children.

"You still think you can teach these crows to be swans!"

At the deep scorn in his voice Jothy twisted her scant skirt and hung her head in shame, conscious again of the gulf between herself and dainty Lakshmi who peeked at her from her father's side but held back from coming near her. Nynah, who had just come up, was rubbing his muddy hands with a deprecating smile.

"The honorable Reddy is our father and mother—" he began, but Raj burst in with unexpected boldness.

"Why can't we read?" he demanded, but his voice sank to a mutter when he was asked to repeat the question.

"It's like putting a flower-garland in the hands of

a monkey," quoted the master sharply. "Now Mot-tai, enough time is lost. Send the boy out with your younger brother to load the sugar-cane for market—"

"Sir !" gasped Raj joyfully. "I'm going to market too ?"

"Get to work !" ordered the Reddy, but he did not say "No," and the boy bounded away with a shout.

Boys had all the luck, Jothy reflected gloomily, as she took her place in the long procession of goats, cows, sheep and water-buffaloes that trampled the muddy lane and set forth along the two-mile path to the usual pasture. Lump-of-Dirt, who was now Rama Reddy's chief herd-boy in Raj's place, left her in charge of two cow-buffaloes while he scampered ahead with his livelier charges.

Jothy wished she could take care of the pretty black goats, whose tails turned perkily up, or the small brown sheep whose tails hung down. Her buffaloes lumbered mournfully along trying to stop for a wallow at every flooded field that they passed. When she poked them timidly with her goad, they looked around at her, their great horns curving back from their heads. She was afraid of them at first but soon discovered that they were meek and stupid beasts that longed only for mud to cool their great, overheated gray bodies.



When they reached the dry and sandy stretch of jungle that bounded the village on the east, they headed straight for the lake by the hill, running so fast that she could not keep up. Before she could reach the rocky shore, they were up to their necks in the water with grunts and snorts of contentment.

It was not hard work to herd cattle in the rainy season. The lake was full of yellowish water. The children left their animals to crop the tufts of coarse grass on the shore and hurled themselves joyfully into it, swimming and splashing like little brown ducks. When they tired of that, they scrambled up the rough, stony hillside where the goats and the sheep of the whole village found shrubs with new green leaves sprouting. The little black kids bent their fuzzy fore-knees to reach the juicy bits which their mothers nosed aside for them, and gambolled playfully about with the children from boulder to boulder.

Lump-of-Dirt nearly split his sides with laughter when a spunky goat penned him in a corner of the rocks and put his head down to butt him. He seized the goat's horns, pushed him away and climbed up farther. Long before Jothy reached the top of the hill her rags and her hair were dry in the noon-day heat.

Her legs felt weak and shaky after her illness. Her breath came in gasps.

While her playmates frolicked about she sat on a great flat rock and looked down at the countryside unrolled beneath her like a beautiful picture. Just below was the wide lake where she could make out the horns of her buffaloes, and crows hopping along their backs. Then there was the sandy stretch of jungle where nothing grew but a tangle of prickly-pear cactus and wild, spiky palms. Beyond, like an island in a sea of green and watery fields, lay her home village of Karumboor. Among the tamarinds and cocoanut-palms she could make out the red tiled roofs of the Oor and the black, square-topped tower of their temple. In the cluster of gray, thatched roofs that were the Chery she could almost pick out the roof, near the central tree, that must be her home hut. A darkened patch on the plain far off showed where lay Amma's home village, Chinna-chery, from where the teacher had come too. It was at that school that Sundari had learned to read out of a book.

At the unwelcome thought of school she turned impatiently around with her back to Karumboor and gazed out at the circle of hills on the other side.

Lump-of-Dirt flung himself down on the rock for a moment and followed her gaze. He was a small, round-faced boy with his head shaved to the crown and his thick black hair hanging to his neck behind. His naked brown body glistened with sweat.

"That is the Sacred Mount !" he informed her, pointing his stick at a blue peak on the horizon.

"Oh, look at the bald-head just in front of it !" Jothy exclaimed, catching sight of a peculiar round rock that just showed over the shoulder of another hill.

"Chee, you donkey !" scoffed Lump-of-Dirt, revealing in his grin the gap left by four lost teeth. "Bald-head, like your father ! That's the Senji Fort hill, that you call a bald-head. My father is driving the sugar-cane to Senji market tomorrow. I'm going to ask the master to make you take care of all the animals tomorrow, so that I can go with him."

"You're not ! I won't !" declared Jothy in alarm. "Please, Brother !" In India your father's brothers' children are part of your own family, and your elders are never, *never* addressed by name, even though they're only a few months older, like Lump-of-Dirt.

"You will see what I'll do !" threatened Lump-of-Dirt, remembering suddenly that this woman was under his orders. "Get down off that rock now and

attend to your buffaloes ! Wash them in the lake and lead them to a new grazing-place. *Chut-poot !* Be quick !”

A new idea took shape in Jothy’s mind as she scrambled down from rock to rock, stopping often to pull out thorns that pierced her calloused little feet. She would not stay behind to herd stupid buffaloes. She would go off along the broad road to market to see the bald-head hill and the other wonderful sights outside. It was the only way she could escape that tiresome school. The day dragged endlessly on.

The children picked cactus-fruit and green nelli-berries to appease their hunger. The crimson cactus-juice stained their lips and teeth red like betel. They chewed and spat in imitation of their parents. The little girls dyed their finger-tips red and put round red caste-marks on each other’s brows. The boys staged fights between crickets, grasshoppers, and praying-man-tises. They started to build a mud village on the shore of the lake but left it unfinished while they swapped stories in the shade of a thorn bush. It seemed years before the sun slanted into the west and they ran about collecting their bleating, lowing herds.

“Ko-o-o-o-o-oh ! Ba ! Ba ! Ba !” Jothy learned to call reassuringly to her slate-gray cows that walked

meekly home ahead of her through the rose-gold-gray dusk, their udders heavy with milk for the Reddy ladies to make into curds and ghee for cakes and curry. The teacher was standing on his porch with a lantern as they drove the herds through the lane. He rang his little bell, but no one could hear it in the din. Grannie ran out and thrust an empty basket into Jothy's hands, telling her to collect manure and straw for fuel. She took the basket with a sly, triumphant smile. Her heart beat with excitement. As they drove the animals into the main street, the Reddy grandmother shouted for Lump-of-Dirt to come and clean the cow-shed.

Jothy stood for a moment at the entrance to the street watching the animals make straight for their homes without any guidance. Each cow and goat and sheep marched up the front steps and through the front door of its owner's house, pushing past the men who chatted on the porches, in its eagerness to reach the straw and the rice-water awaiting it in the sheds in the inner courtyards. Soon their bleats and lows and grunts were muffled within courtyard walls. The streets were still in the gray dusk.

Instead of going home, Jothy hid her basket in the hedge and ran around the outside of the village till she found the place where they were loading sugar-cane.

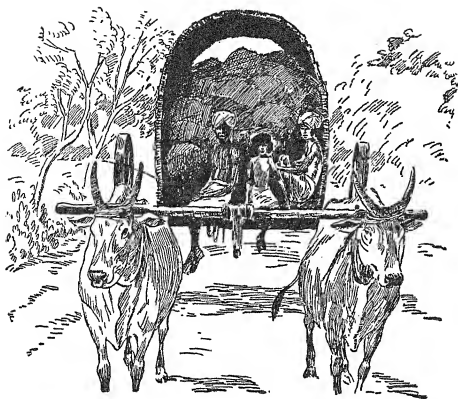
She was only just in time. Young Uncle and Raj were pushing a pair of brown bullocks under the yoke of a great covered wagon. The master stood near them, repeating directions while his brothers and his son, Krishna Reddy, and other men of the caste village offered advice. No one noticed a small figure run to the back of the cart, as it tilted down, and pull herself up into it by the ropes which tied the load securely in.

For a moment, as the yoke came down on the necks of the oxen, Jothy found herself swung high in air with one foot in a loop of rope and the other wildly seeking a firmer base. But she had not climbed after green tamarinds for nothing. She held on tight and managed to climb in and lie squeezed into a small space between the top of the load and the curving roof of woven palm leaves. She felt the cart tremble as Young Uncle and Raj jumped aboard at the front, clucking to the bullocks; then they were off, with a terrific jolt that knocked her shoulders against the bamboo braces. The pain of the jolt brought the tears to her eyes. She almost cried aloud for them to stop and let her go home to Amma.

A wave of weariness and homesickness and hunger swept over her. What was the strange world outside

going to be like ? She had never been farther than Amma's village, five miles away. What would Amma and Nynah think if she did not come home ? Baby would cry and Grannie would search everywhere with the rest. Would Big Brother beat her when he found her ?

She was flung from side to side as the wagon jolted and swayed over a rough cart-track rutted from the heavy rains. The wheels swished through water and squelched into mud. Still she hesitated. If she went back now she would have to sit and make circles in the sand and stand with her arms folded. If she went on she would find out what lay beyond those hills — perhaps even see the bald-head hill and the Iron Path — perhaps, a white man ! The thought thrilled her. She gritted her teeth bravely, pressed her hollow little stomach against a knobby sack and took a firmer grip on the arching bamboos. She was not going back. She was going on !



#### CHAPTER IV

### *JOTHY SEES THE WORLD OUTSIDE*

**J**OTHY must have fallen asleep in spite of the jolting of the wagon, for it seemed no time at all before she woke to find herself with her head downwards and her feet up in the air. She clutched at the sacks ahead of her with a push that sent them rolling down the incline, then crawled down after them to the tongue of the cart which now rested on the ground while the bullocks lay beside it peacefully munching



straw. She rubbed her eyes and looked about her in a daze.

In the light of the brilliant stars she saw that they had reached the broad white highway. Other carts were drawn up at the roadside beside theirs. Voices and laughter emerged from a shack across the road — a peculiar shack, built around the base of a tall toddy-palm. It must be a toddy-shop. Young Uncle and Raj came out in a moment, coughing and spitting and very merry. They stared in incredulous astonishment at the small stowaway who ran forward to greet them, frightened by the darkness and strangeness. Raj's slight tipsiness changed to righteous indignation. He seized his sister and slapped and shook her, but Young Uncle rescued her and lifted her to his hip. She buried her face in his shoulder and sobbed, "I'm so hungry ! Brother, give me something to eat !"

"You can go straight home and get your food !" Brother replied hard-heartedly, winding his cloth around his head and poking up the bullocks.

"No, no !" Jothy was terrified at the prospect of being left alone in the dark with five miles of lonely jungle-track between herself and home. She screamed until Young Uncle set her down in the cart and untied a knot in his loin-cloth.

"See !" he reassured her, clinking some copper pice together. "The master gave us money for food and for betel leaves to chew by the way. Don't cry !" He held out a coin to her. "There is an old woman selling cakes over there —"

Quick as a flash Jothy seized the pice and ran across the road. At the door of the toddy-shop squatted an old Mohammedan woman with a white cloth over her head, guarding a tray of greasy fried cakes. In return for the pice she picked out two brown pagodas and two twisted murukku and wrapped them in a piece of plantain leaf.

"If anyone passes this way going to Karumboor," Young Uncle called to the woman, "tell them to tell Mottai—Rama Reddy's Mottai—that the child is with us."

Jothy swung her feet from the front of the cart, as they rode on, and munched her cakes in an ecstasy of happiness. Indian children like hot, spicy food in the way that western children like chocolates or ice-cream. Although the red chilis bit her tongue and brought tears to her eyes, she kept every delicious morsel in her mouth as long as she could.

The bullocks trotted easily along the road which gleamed straight before them across the wild, open

country. Raj poked his stick into their hind-quarters, twisted their tails and made strange, clicking noises with his tongue that his sister tried in vain to imitate. They found themselves presently in a long procession of loaded carts, the bobbing heads of each yoke of oxen so close to the cart ahead that they nibbled at some of the straw or sugar-cane which protruded at the back. The drivers were merry with toddy. Far down the line a driver took up the minor strain of a familiar song, his voice yodelling and quavering through the stillness. The children joined joyfully in the response of *Yay-la, Yay-la* after each line.

Young Uncle stopped to take a passenger aboard — a wandering beggar who hailed them as they passed. Jothy was pushed into a hollow among the sacks to make room for him. She chewed a bit of pungent betel leaf which Young Uncle had given her and stared out between their heads at the road. Owls hooted mysteriously in the trees. Far away rose the weird long-drawn whine of a jackal, followed by the howls of the whole pack. "Where ? Where ? Where ?" they yelped in the jungle. "Here ! Here ! Here !" Once the bulls stopped short with a jerk and a snort as a huge dark snake slid across the road ahead of them and disappeared into a tangle of underbrush.

"Now is that a good omen or a bad omen?" inquired Young Uncle with a yawn, but nobody answered him.

"Look!" cried Jothy, pointing ahead where a nibbled fragment of the festival moon rose over the rounded top of a hill. "The bald-head hill!"

"Senji Fort!" corrected Raj loftily. "Rajah Daysingh's hill."

"Ho, Old One, can't you sing us a song about Daysingh Rajah?" Young Uncle suggested. The beggar cleared his throat and grunted, indicating his willingness to pay his fare by providing amusement. Grannie had told Jothy some stories about the great Rajah who ruled this region before the Mohammedans and the white people came. Once she and Raj had joined a crowd in the Oor to listen to a wandering minstrel who sang marvellous tales of Daysingh. "Sing how he went to Delhi to tame the Emperor's horse, Old One!" she begged. He lifted his voice in the ancient ballad till the drivers ahead and behind stopped their jesting to listen:

*That heav'n-born steed, Barasari,  
With mane of gold, Barasari,  
A floating cloud, Barasari —*

*Like a tongue of flame from the glowing sun  
He flashed before their startled eyes;  
Like an arrow from the bow of the moon,  
Up to the cloud-world did he rise.  
Forests faded with fright in the blast,  
Mountains were melted to dust as he passed.*

*The Emperor, with upturned gaze  
And sixty kings were all amazed.  
The captive-father beat his breast  
And cried: Come back, my lion-son!  
Return to me, my precious one!  
No youth can pass through such a test!*

*But the wonder-child, Daysinghu,  
Senji's prince, Daysinghu,  
The tiger-cub, Daysinghu,  
Crouched on the back of that wild steed,  
Pulled tight the reins and gripped his hair  
And guided him through paths of air —  
A stripling, yet of kingly breed,  
The Rajah, Daysinghu,  
Where sixty kings had failed, he won,  
Set free his sire and took his boon,  
His bride, the Emperor's youngest girl,  
Fair Raneebai, great Delhi's pearl.*

When Jothy awoke at dawn, they were in Senji. It was like Karumboor with its Oor of brick houses and its Chery of thatched huts set in the midst of green rice fields but, oh, five or six times as big! There was no Iron Path, but where three great highroads crossed there was a bazaar—a marvellous place where merchants squatted in low booths along both sides of the street, or merely spread their wares in the dust of the roadside for a day before moving on to the next small town. Young Uncle left the children each with a copper pice to spend, while he took the sugar-cane to trade with some middleman farther up the road. “We rest the bullocks till evening,” he informed them. “Meet me here in front of the bamboo bazaar when the sun sets.”

A whole day for adventure, and a copper pice to spend! Raj ran off to the weekly cattle-market to look at animals but Jothy had no time to spare for anything so common. She wandered from booth to booth, gazing at the wonderful sights that she had never seen before. The bangle seller held up ropes of delicate glass bangles in all sizes, a rainbow come to life. The cloth merchant tore off lengths of red calico or sunset-hued silks for chattering women who haggled over the price. There were marvellous colored

combs and ornamental hair-pins, strings of every sort of beads, ear-rings of all kinds from iron to gold, folded sarees of clean-smelling new homespun or hand-woven silk — everything to delight the heart of a girl, but they laughed at her when she held out her copper pice.

The mat-weaver spread his grass mats temptingly upon the ground — sweet-scented broad sleeping-mats with red stripes and fringes at their ends; long narrow dining-mats, tiny squares to sit upon. Women paid for these with small bits of silver. The flower sellers were tying tiny yellow chrysanthemums and pink oleanders into bouquets for the hair. Basket-weavers slit bamboos and wove them deftly into baskets while their purchasers waited. Jothy turned from all these unattainable treasures with a sigh. She was about to exchange her pice for some red cosmetic-powder which looked pretty in its cone-shaped mound when a delicious odor stopped her. Appams !

Under a nearby tree squatted an old woman beside a clay bowl which was set on three stones over a fire, frying the rice-cakes called appams. That was what Jothy wanted. Her whole being cried out for something to eat. She held out her coin to the old woman who nodded and began at once to pour some rice-



batter into the greased and steaming pot. As it sizzled, she lifted a pan of red-hot coals on two sticks and set it over the top for a cover. A moment later a fresh hot appam lay on a broad leaf in Jothy's hand, while a second sizzled over the fire for her. Appams are round and white with a brittle crust of brown all around their outside edge.

Jothy nibbled the crust first and then the middle. However hard she tried to make them last, both cakes were eaten in no time, and her hunger was almost as great as ever. She hovered about near the old woman, longing for more. When she begged, the woman drove her away, but she came back. She must have more. When the woman rose to gather more sticks



for her fire, Jothy stole forward on a sudden impulse, snatched an appam off the tray and fled.

There was a great commotion behind her which she took to be the old woman in pursuit. People shouted at her. A fearful shriek sounded behind her and she glanced back over her shoulder. A terrible monster was chasing her—a great black devil that roared and breathed out smoke. She stopped, too frightened to move, then dodged frantically to one side. As the monster shrieked again she started back across the road, but the creature was upon her. With a squeal of triumph it caught her and knocked her flat.

When she opened her eyes a crowd of people stood around her, among them Raj who wept and wrung his hands. A young woman in a pink sarree bent over her, wiping the dust off her face with a wet cloth. "Does it hurt you anywhere, Little One?" she asked kindly. "Sit up and see if you are hurt."

As Jothy sat up she had a glimpse of that monster. It stood quite still and quiet now, but she hid her face and wept. Her new friend felt her bones all over, thinking she was hurt, but Jothy wrenched herself away and clung to Raj. "What is it?" she cried, pointing. "What is it?"

A roar of laughter went up from the crowd.

"Jungle child ! She thinks it's a beast ! She doesn't know a motor !"

Raj shook her, much irritated now at her display of ignorance. "Keep quiet!" he commanded. "Donkey ! That's a bus !"

"We're so sorry we knocked you down," the girl in the pink saree was saying, bending over her again. "You ran in front of the bus. Is there anything we can do ?"

Jothy stared past her at the bus. She saw that it was a sort of cart with people getting into it and sitting in rows. They were leaning over the side now to smile and laugh at her. "Jungle child !" she heard them say. She buried her face in the crook of her arm, abashed.

"Ask for a ride !" prompted Raj eagerly. "Ask her to let us both have a ride !"

"That's it !" encouraged the crowd good-humoredly. "Take both the jungle children for a ride. Shabash ! Bravo !"

Before Jothy knew quite what had happened she found herself squeezed between her new friend and Raj on the front seat of the open bus. She had heard her brother and others talk of buses but she had never dreamed of anything like this. When the engine

sprang to life with a roar that shook their seats she clutched her brother and screamed to get out, but the girl held her tight and laughed. Soon they began to move through the bazaar—fast, faster, faster. At each honk of the horn people moved out of the way.

As Jothy became used to the speed, she relaxed a little and began to look about her. The seats were full of women—or were they girls?—who giggled and talked incessantly. There was one other man besides the driver—a tall man in coat and turban whom the girls called “Teacher.” “We are school-girls, Little One,” they told her, amused at her questioning stare. “Do you know what school is?”

Jothy nodded, forgetting her hatred of the word in her pride at knowing something that they knew. Their school must be very different from hers. Doubtless they were high caste ladies, for they wore spotless sarees and blouses, and their hair was oiled back into smooth sleek braids like Lakshmi’s. Some had caste-marks on their foreheads, yet they let her sit among them and touch them. She could not make it out at all.

They drove out along a highway between green fields to the foot of a hill—the bald-head hill, Jothy realized suddenly as she looked up at it. At her ex-

clamation the girls burst out laughing again. "Bald-head hill !" they mimicked, leaning out to look at its smooth round top. "Look !" cried one. "It is just like a Brahmin's bald-head. That temple-tower sticks up on top like a tuft of hair !"

"We're going to climb the hill, Little One," someone informed her. "Do you want to come with us ? We want to see where Daysingh Rajah kept his queen, Raneebai."

Altogether it was a day of wonders. Jothy passed from one excitement to another in a sort of daze. First there were these strange young women who said they had come by the Iron Path and the bus from their distant school to visit the Senji Fort. They fed the children small bananas called plantains and questioned them as they climbed the thousand rocky steps that led to the top of the Fort Hill.

"Karumboor ?" exclaimed the girl in the pink saree. "Really ? That's near *my* home ! I am Jeeva from Chinna-chery. Who is your father ? Mottai ? Why, I know you ! Your mother's family live next door to me !"

"You don't live in the Chery ?" stammered Raj, looking in amazement at her clean clothing.

"Oh, yes, I do," laughed Jeeva, patting him on the

head as they walked on together. "My people belong to the Christian Way, and our Chery is as clean as the Oor. You must learn to be clean," she added, tweaking Jothy's tangled hair.

Up and up they climbed, on rough stone steps built in ages past by slaves of the kings of Senji. Frangipani trees dropped waxen blossoms which the girls thrust into their glossy braids. At every turn of the stair was a carved watch-tower of stone in which they rested for a moment before climbing on.

"Down these very steps came poor little Raneebai to die on her husband's funeral-pyre," moaned the smallest of the group, who had taken Jothy's hand to help her. "Just my age—fourteen! Think of it! I'm glad I'm not Raneebai!"

As they reached the base of the smooth rocks which made the "bald-head" they looked up, wondering how they could ever scale the top. Only the bees could reach those crevices where their honey was stored in great brown hives, unattainable by man. But no! Even as they looked, a man crept downward over the slippery face of the cliff, clinging to a tough vine that hung from the summit. "He belongs to the tribe of Irulas!" exclaimed the teacher. "They get their living by selling honey."

At last they reached the bridge across the ravine where once all the little queen's maidens had perished in the fire, and approached the stern walls of the fort. Raj appeared on the battlements frightening away the monkeys that inhabited the place with his hoots and calls. Jothy expected that when they passed through the great arched door they would find Daysingh and Raneebai riding on elephants inside. It was a disappointment to find only weeds and bats and monkeys among the crumbling stone pavilions.

"Tell me more stories, Sister," begged Jothy, following Jeeva when they scattered over the hill-top.

"You must learn to read, Little One," said Jeeva, leading the way into the queen's bathing-cavern to get a cold drink from the spring. "I was just like you once," she confided, sitting down on a rock inside the cave. "I herded goats all day. Do you?"

"Buffaloes, not goats."

"I learned to read in Chinna-chery. Now I read books and books. Can you read?"

Jothy considered for a moment. "Ah? Ee? Oo?" she inquired dubiously.

Jeeva pinched her cheeks and laughed. "Listen to the child! Yes, 'Ah, Ee, Oo, Oh, Ow,' and 'Pah, Pee, Poo, Poh, Pow' and all the rest of it, till you string

them together like beads and they make stories."

Jothy forgot this new idea for the time in the excitement of the next great adventure. When they reached the bottom of the hill again, they had a feast in one of the carved stone galleries of the lower fort. She and Raj stood speechless while the girls swept out the dust of ages with leafy boughs, making the empty halls ring with their light-hearted laughter. When they fetched brass pots of cooked rice from under the bus-seats and began to serve it out on plates of leaves stitched together with broom-straws, the children looked on longingly from afar. Except at the time of Meena's wedding, they had not seen such white rice. In spite of their hunger, they turned their faces away in order not to pollute by their gaze the food of a higher caste.

"Sit down, little ones!" one of the merry voices called. "Wait! Go and wash your hands and faces first. There is water in the tank out there."

So Raj and Jothy, jungle children and Chery children in their dirty rags, sat down to a marvellous feast of rice and mutton-curry with the teacher, the bus-driver and nearly all of the radiant creatures who called themselves school-girls. "The vegetarians are

eating separately," someone said. Jeeva tucked her pink skirts between her ankles and bent over to ladle out more and more curry on their rice. "Eat !" she whispered. "I know what hunger is ! You are such thin little things. Eat !"

Joathy felt sad when they returned to Senji and she had to say good-bye to Jeeva Sister. "Think of my being so near home and I can't go !" lamented Jeeva. "If you see my mother, tell her I'll be home for the Festival. I'll see you then !"

"That must be old Murugan's girl," Young Uncle said, when they were on their way that night. "I know old Murugan of Chinna-chery. He is a clever one. When our teacher was there, he applied for a piece of land from the Government. He had good crops and sent his girl away to study. His boy drives a bus and earns a salary of thirty rupees a month."

"And the master pays us four rupees a year and food !" added Raj thoughtfully.

"Even so !" his uncle agreed. "I am going to ask the teacher to apply for land for me. Why not ? Why slave for so little ?"

"It is written on your forehead," quoted Joathy drowsily, stretching her weary limbs at ease on the



empty sacks. The words made her suddenly homesick for Grannie, who said them so often, and for Amma. It seemed years since she had seen them all.

"It is good to know reading," Raj was arguing, as he swung his whip over the bulls. "The master made a mistake in the debt-note and my Nynah was going to put his mark to it. Then Nynah was afraid and he took the paper to our teacher, and the teacher found out that it said the debt was twenty instead of ten rupees — or something like that. Look at that ! I am going to read, and I am going to drive a bus. Pah ! How slowly these beasts travel ! Get up !"

Jothy felt suddenly small and lonely as she watched the white road slip away behind them into a loom of shadow. Two hours before she had been almost ready to accept Jeeva Sister's laughing invitation to come with them to the Iron Path and to school. She had marvelled that Jeeva Sister could ever want to leave that wonder-world of bazaars and food and clothes and books to return to Chinna-chery. Now she wanted just one thing, and wanted it with all her might, even more than she had wanted the glass bangles or the appams or the white rice.

"Drive faster, Brother !" she urged, a weary little sob in her voice. "I want my mother !"



## CHAPTER V

### *RAY GROWS UP*

THE SUN was well up next morning when the travellers came within sight of the Karumboor hill and lake. Lump-of-Dirt and the other children caught sight of them from afar and ran to meet them, shouting and gesticulating with excitement. Jothy was bubbling over with news but there was an uneasy feeling, deep down in her heart, that her cousin might have

taken revenge on her by telling the master about her escapade, and trouble might follow. When that small boy swung himself into the cart and fell upon his father, however, he was much too full of news himself to hold any grudge.

"Last night a white man came here !" he announced jubilantly. "You missed the fun !"

His cousins' own flow of words was checked with amazement at this information. The one sight they had sought in vain at Senji was a white man. More children clambered into the cart or scampered in the rear, all chattering at once.

"Why did you go away, Jothy ? He brought a song-singing box that sang like this — *Whee-ee-eee !*" They whined nasally in imitation of a gramophone, and squealed with laughter. "He wasn't so white. He was pink. His hair was sand-color when he took off his sun-helmet."

"His topee looked like a rice-pot on his head !" giggled another.

"He wore a coat, and he wore leg-jackets and big heavy shoes that made a noise when he walked —"

"And he had a moustache — a yellow moustache !"

They shrieked with laughter at each new memory. Raj tried to make himself heard. "Ho, *we* rode in a

big motor-bus in Senji," he began, but he could get no further.

"Ho !" they scoffed in return. "The white man came in a motor. He rode into our Chery. Look ! You can see the wheel-track there in the mud."

"We were just driving in the cattle when he came," Perumal piped up. "Such a confusion as there was ! All the animals snorted and put up their tails and ran and the carpenter's buffaloes charged at the motor. But the white man drove it fast !"

"He took off one wheel and put on another." Small Murugan continued the tale. "I held the teacher's lantern and watched him."

"Such a great gentleman did that himself ?" marvelled Young Uncle. "Had he no servants ?"

"No, he must be low caste like us, for he pinched our cheeks and patted our heads and sat on the teacher's mat on the ground. While he was talking to the older people we got a long cactus-thorn and pushed it into the wheel of the motor," Lump-of-Dirt continued eagerly. "The wheel was soft like clay. It made a funny noise and got thin."

"Tell me," interrupted Young Uncle, seizing his son affectionately by the ear. "Did our people agree to join the Christian Way ?"

"Oh, they talked half the night. I was asleep."

"Yes, they agreed to join the Way after Pongal festival when we have our new clothes," pock-marked little Perumal took up the tale. "The priest and priestess and the leather-workers won't join, but all the other Chery people stood up. And the Reddys — all the masters — came and stood in the lane and talked to the white man. Such fun!"

"Humph!" grunted Young Uncle, stirring up the weary oxen with his stick. "A lot *they* ever did for us! How much money did the white man give us?"

"None!" chorused the children. "Nothing at all! Not even rice or a handful of betel. But he told the teacher to buy wood and new thatch for the school-house. He said — Perumal, *you* tell how he said it!"

Perumal pursed up his mouth and mimicked the white man's strange pronunciation of Tamil. The children bounded away, still giggling and mimicking, leaving Raj and Jothy to feel that the thrill had quite gone out of their home-coming.

Amma was glad enough to see them, however, when they ran ahead of the slow cart to find her. She was knee-deep in mud and water, transplanting rice seedlings one by one from a pile that lay in a palm-leaf

mooram or tray on the bank. She straightened her back and called out to them, joyfully exclaiming over every detail of their journey as they chattered on the ridge at the edge of the field. All the women stopped work to listen and ejaculate their wonder. Nynah left his plough and came running across to slap and shake them delightedly.

"We were like crazy people when you did not come for food," he scolded Jothy. "I had no children here to receive the blessing of the white priest who came last night. Every other man's children—"

"Don't scold them!" begged his wife. "Is it not enough that they are come?" and she stooped wearily to her work. "There is porridge for you in the pot, little ones!"

"True, true!" her husband agreed. "Thank God they are safely back again. And a new life begins for us all at this festival. Come soon, boy. You must learn to plough straight, and you both must go to school every morning and night. The preacher said that girls must read as well as boys. If you run off again, Baby, I shall beat you!"

"I'm going to read big books," announced Jothy happily, as she balanced along the ridges. "And wear

a pink saree and flowers in my hair, and little, flower-shaped ear-rings. I'm going to ride in a motor-bus which Brother will drive !”

Nearly two months of cloudless blue skies intervened before the festivals began. Every morning and evening the children ran to the teacher's house to struggle with the 265 sound-symbols of the Tamil alphabet.

“Add the sounds of (i.e., spell) *mooram* !” the teacher would command. And eighteen voices droned “Moo—ra—mm, mooram,” while eighteen small fore-fingers traced the three symbols in the sand:

moo ra mm.

It was a proud day for Jothy when she learned to “add” the sounds and draw the wiggly letters of her own name.

Soon after that came the thrill of writing on a beautiful slate with a stub of a slate-pencil gripped firmly between thumb and forefinger. Meanwhile the walls of their new school were slowly rising. The children helped to carry in baskets of clay from outside the village which the men mixed with water and slapped on the walls and moulded into shape. Every night they added a foot or so to the “baby-walls” (as the Tamil has it), and then stopped to let it dry in the hot sun for a day. It was weary work after a day's labor, for the

teacher would not let them dig up the mud near by, as they did in building their own huts. He seemed to cherish a deep aversion to the pits of stagnant water and rubbish inside the Chery.

The young carpenter of the Oor was willing to make doors, windows and rafters in return for the silver which the teacher paid him. He arrived one morning while the children were still at their lessons on the porch of the teacher's house, and stopped his hammering frequently to watch proceedings. His little girl, Rukku, followed him day after day. While he worked she edged nearer and nearer to the busy group on the porch, fascinated by the stories and songs which they learned. Finally she consented to sit down, at a safe distance from the outcastes, and write letters in the sand, much to her father's amusement. "Is that what girls are made for?" he called fondly.

Sundari, who had lessons in a class with her brother, Dahvedu, after the herd-children left, amused herself by teaching Rukku. Before the wood-work was finished she could write and read almost as many words as the rest. She followed Sundari about, begging for new words to write, poring over a tattered reader until she could spell out the names under the pictures.

"Shabash!" ejaculated the carpenter in amazed de-



light when he found her at it one day. "She reads more already than her brother who has gone to the Brahmin school-master for two years. He sits all day long and learns nothing !"

"I can say a hundred texts !" contradicted his son sullenly. He was the very miniature of his father, even to the sacred thread which the carpenter, blacksmith, goldsmith and merchant castes wear as well as the Brahmins. "She has a book with the words in black print which the eye can see. Our school-master makes us read from sentences scratched on strips of palm-leaf in the old-fashioned way. Send me to the new teacher !"

News of the school spread in the Oor. More visitors came to stand in the lane while the little pariahs sang songs to the accompaniment of the teacher's fiddle, rattled off answers to his questions, added up numbers in their heads, with some help from fingers and toes, and wrote with squeaky slate-pencils on small slates held in the crooks of their left arms. Other children drifted nearer and nearer but some, like Lakshmi, were snatched away by their elders.

"What are we coming to ?" the grandmothers grumbled as they met at the village well with brass water-jars. "Sweepers and ditch-diggers trying to read like

Brahmins ! What profits it to struggle against one's fate ?”

Meanwhile the day's regular work went on as usual. Padmini, the potter's daughter, came to school with her hands all red from the clay which she brought for her father's wheel. The washerman's grandson, Murugan, nodded over his slate after a night of washing clothes in the river. Rukku's brother proved to be far quicker with plane and saw than with figures, and struggled in vain to catch up with his clever little sister. As the hot sun scorched the grass, Jothy wandered farther and farther afield in search of pasture for her buffaloes. Her eyes were wide open now for new plants to take home and show the teacher who could tell the most fascinating tales about “leaf-kitchens” and “seed-babies.” He knew astonishing details about “blanket-poochies,” the caterpillars, and spiders and other creepy-crawlies which were so common.

The transplanted rice seedlings needed plenty of water. From midnight till past sunrise the men toiled at the wells, lifting enough water to irrigate the fields. The poorer Reddys, with their sons, did their own irrigation. None had so many fields nor employed so many servants as Rama Reddy. As more and more fields were planted he started a second shift, ordering

Raj to help his father and Old Uncle at dawn with five hundred buckets for a new field. This meant giving up morning school for a time, but the boy was thrilled at the thought of mounting the well-sweep like a real man.

Old Uncle was waiting for them when they arrived at the biggest irrigation well that first morning. He squatted beside the well-curb, spitting red betel-juice in every direction. Raj felt himself really grown-up when he accepted a green betel leaf with a dab of unslaked lime on it, folded it deftly about an areca nut and crammed it into his mouth. The mixture puckered his mouth like a drawstring and paralyzed his tongue, but he chewed and spat manfully as he dug his toes into the first notch at the base of the central pillar and climbed up.

The well-sweep was a long, clumsy see-saw, made of a palmyra palm trunk twelve feet above the ground. Nynah followed him up to it, while Old Uncle descended with many groans and grunts into the well, where he stood on a narrow stone platform that jutted out from the sides, about eight feet below the rim.

"This is not the time for water-lifting," he complained, fastening the circular metal scoop to the bot-

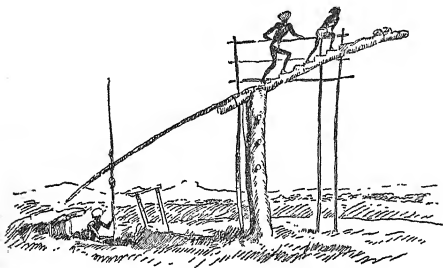
tom of the bamboo pole that hung from one end of the well-sweep. "The sun is up already."

"Let it be !" grunted Nynah in reply as he and Raj stood poised above, their hands on the frail bamboo railing which was built across two bracing-poles for their support. "Begin, Brother, begin !" He grasped the boy's shoulder from behind and pushed him forward, but Raj shook off his guiding hand. This was not the first time he had trod the yatttham or well-sweep.

Often, when he and other boys had spent the night keeping watch over flocks of sheep and goats penned in newly-ploughed fields, they had run across to swim in this great square well, climbing down the jutting stone steps to the water or diving in from the bank. Many times he had climbed up to take the place of a water-lifter for a few minutes, but now he was doing it as a real "half-coolie" to earn his half-wage of daily millet and his new loin-cloth at Pongal festival. He knew exactly what to do.

The end of the sweep from which dangled the bucket by its long pole was up in the air. Raj and his father climbed up the steep staircase of notches, pressing that end down with their feet till the bucket sank into the

well. As the boy stood poised for a moment over the green depths, he felt giddy and clutched the bamboo railing. He turned and marched resolutely uphill again to the other end. The bucket came up dripping and splashing. Uncle seized and overturned it. The water roared through the cement trench and out into the irrigation-ditches between the fields. Down went



the bucket again under Raj's feet as he climbed warily back over the well, averting his eyes from the dizzy green depths so far below. Nimble he ran back to the land side. It was fun to climb around up here like a monkey in a tree. Why was Nynah grunting so ?

"The boy is too light," Nynah gasped. "I have to

press down for him and for me. Why can't the master put your son on this job?"

"He's no better than a mosquito perching on the yayttam," agreed Old Uncle, upturning another bag of water. "Why? The master does not like this matter of the boy's learning to read. He says little, but he likes it not at all. Since the teacher came among us, the Reddys have no peace of mind," he chuckled.

"And I, buffalo that I am, would have put my mark to a debt-note of fifty rupees instead of twenty-five," lamented Nynah for the hundredth time. "My sons and my sons' sons would have labored to pay the debt. It is good to know reading. Sing, Brother, sing!"

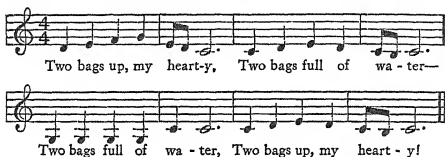
Raj was getting used to the movement so that he could look about him as he climbed and poised and climbed again. His father and uncle commenced to sing the count. A thrill ran down the boy's spine as he timed his movements to the familiar tune:

*"One bag up, my hearty,  
One bag full of water —"*

sang Old Uncle inside the well, his yodel echoing from the sides as the scoop plunged into the water.

*"One bag full of water,  
One bag up, my hearty!"*

echoed Nynah and Raj aloft, as the water swished through the ditches. The tune was something like this, but with many little breaks and quavers:



Up and down went the yatttham in time to the music. At the end of each line a flowing brook pushed forward the sluggish stream that crept between the criss-cross boundaries. Beneath the feet of the sun-god the young rice unrolled a carpet of emerald velvet, embroidered with threads of silver water. Palmyra palms marched around the edges of the fields like stiff, turbaned sepoys in a row. Raj could see the glint of the lake by the hill where Jothy must now be with the other herd-children. He almost stopped the teeter in his excitement as he caught a glimpse of the rounded "bald-head" top of Senji Fort.

It was magnificent to be there so high above the world. He could see over all the roofs of the Chery and the Oor to the millet fields and rice fields of other Reddys on the far side. Amma, down there below

him, was only one of a row of scarlet splotches against the green. Other yaythams were going up and down over other wells. Parrots chattered in the palm trees. Snatches of other songs drifted across through the golden sunlight.

Suddenly mindful of his business again, Raj joined the song. After the seventh verse of every twenty, Old Uncle sang a story to keep the count. Sometimes it was a song of Rama and the spotted deer, or of Valli and her arrow. Sometimes he improvised new lines that made the master or his brothers stop to laugh and listen as they came by to oversee the work. Today the song described the building of the yaytham. The boy and his father echoed each couplet to complete the stanza:

*"Measuring eight below the rim,  
Dug he two holes deeply.*

*Spaced out five good feet between,  
Drove in beams securely.*

*Three cross-beams to stand upon—  
Thus the platform's builded.*

*Four feet from the well-curb  
Planted he a pillar.*



*On either side tall bracing-poles  
Flanked the central pillar.*

*Is the well-sweep crooked?  
Is it out of kilter?*

*What ails the metal bucket?  
Has its chain got twisted?"*

"Is it really twisted, or are you making it up?" called the boy, but his father slapped him and motioned to him not to break the count. He listened for the next line and sang it gleefully:

*"The carpenter was cross-eyed,  
Wall-eyed was the blacksmith.*

*A whiskered workman set it up;  
Moustaches blurred his vision.*

*Hence the teeter rattles,  
Hence the scoop swings wildly.*

*Thus our well-sweep's builded,  
Thus we lift the water.*

*God, who worlds hath builded,  
Haste to send us water!*

*At Thy feet we worship;  
Help Thy slaves, we pray Thee !"*

"Humph !" grunted Nynah now. "Twenty bags are up. Pause a moment to give the boy breath."

"Whiskered workman !" giggled the boy. "Moustaches ! How many more buckets do we lift ?"

"Listen to the boy !" remarked his father grimly, wiping the sweat out of his eyes with the back of his hand. "Twenty bags up and he asks how many more ! Don't interrupt the song again or we must begin all over. Humph ! Begin !"

Raj's laughter soon ceased as they trod the teeter up and down, up and down, while the sun burned hotter and hotter. He looked longingly down into the green water now, but he climbed on up his hill that never ended, till his toes ached from gripping the notches and his breath came in gasps. Through his half-closed eyelids the world was a glare of green and gold. He clung with his mind to his uncle's song as he clung with his feet and hands to the yatttham, licking his parched lips at every splash of the water. They did not stop again until the hundredth bucket was up. Then he tumbled down the pillar and lay panting in

the long, narrow shadow, too tired even to go for a drink.

"You will get used to it in time," the master encouraged him as he came by. He called a man to take the boy's place. "You go to my house. The grandmother wants the cow-shed swept."

As Raj crawled through the gap in the cactus hedge at the back of the master's house, he could hear the grandmother's voice raised in high altercation as usual. He grinned as he pounded on the back door. Some little daughter-in-law was being put in her place. It was Lakshmi's mother who admitted him—a plump and good-natured woman whose black and yellow saree set off the gold tint of her face and arms. "Take care how you do your work!" she warned him. "The grandmother is in a bad mood today! Our Tara left a stone in the rice!"

Raj waited in the doorway until she disappeared into the door that led to the inner court, then he crossed over to get his bunch of broom-straws and his basket from the corner. Most of the houses in the Oor were built around only one courtyard, the fourth side of which was the cattle-shed, but Rama Reddy had built on a second court back of the first so that the cattle

were quite separate from the family. Either Raj or Lump-of-Dirt slept here at night to guard them.

As Raj swept the straw and filth off the ground in the stalls which were roofed only with palm branches, he could hear the Reddy women chattering at their housework in the inner court. Delicious odors floated through the doorway and mingled with the stench of the walled yard where he worked. He tiptoed to the door and put his eye to a crack in the warped wood. He could see the whole inside of the house without being seen. The first court was stone-paved, with carved wooden pillars upholding the roof of the low verandas opening into rooms, which surrounded it on three sides. On its stone pedestal in the center of the court grew the sacred tulsi plant, beyond which lights flickered before a shrine in a dim corner.

The verandas were bright with the silk sarees of the Reddy women who bent to their tasks with a will. By the stone mortar, Lakshmi's mother stood opposite a widowed cousin in white. They lifted their brass-tipped pestles high over their heads and brought them down alternately, thump-thump, thump-thump, on the unhusked grain. Another was carrying out one palm-leaf tray after another of yellow lentils to spread in the

sunlight of the courtyard, while another was already crushing some of the lentils into a paste, with a heavy cylinder of stone in another mortar. Two "poor relations" who lived in the house had the heavy grinding-stones between them on the floor. White flour dripped in a steady stream to the mat as they fed the husked grain into a hole at the top and turned the upper stone round and round against the lower.

Lakshmi and her youngest sister-in-law, Tara, were grinding curry-stuffs under the eye of the grandmother, who sat enthroned on a mat in the shade, watching everyone. Each wielded a heavy stone rolling pin over a flat, smooth stone. Tara still blinked back tears as she curved a delicate, jewelled hand to pat the scarlet paste into an increasing ball, cooling her fingers in a brass pot of water beside her before she took up more hot chilis to grind. Lakshmi was grinding turmeric roots into a yellow paste with water, then adding coriander and cummin and other spices as the old lady directed. It takes years of experience to mix those curry-spices in just the right proportions.

"Did divine Seeta try to neglect her house-duties and run off?" Raj heard the old lady complain at some remark of her granddaughter. "Did royal Sakuntala talk back to her elders and question their decrees?"

We must get you a mother-in-law, Little One, to teach you submission. Your father makes too great a pet of you."

Lakshmi stood up to straighten her back and came straight for the doorway through which Raj was peeking. He picked up his broom and fell to work hastily. If they knew he had let his gaze rest upon their food, they would throw it all away—that scarlet chili and yellow turmeric paste, that fine flour and the crushed lentils, and all those brinjals, purple eggplants, and long green okras, bunches of large white radishes and split cocoanuts that lay in the sunlight still awaiting attention from a sharp knife. He patted his stomach so that it made a hollow sound, as Lakshmi stood in the doorway watching him sweep.

"Give me a little rice-water?" he begged in an undertone. "I am empty."

She disappeared, then crept stealthily back, carrying a small brass chembu of water as well as the rice-water, and shut the door gently behind her. "Hold out your hands," she directed. The boy rinsed them off under the water as she poured it, leaning far over with her silk skirts tucked securely between her silver-circled feet to avoid pollution. He squatted down and sloped the palms of his two hands against his mouth, so that

the stream of milky fluid from her brass tumbler poured straight down his throat, still warm.

"Tell me," said Lakshmi, as he rinsed off his hands again and took up his broom, "how is the school ? I want to come too."

"Is that what the grandmother is scolding about ?" inquired Raj.

"My mother is from the city and so is my newest sister, Tara. They say that in these days girls may go to school and learn. They want me to study, and my father and brothers are willing if I sit apart with Rukku. They always let me do what I want."

"There are five boys from the Oor beside Rukku," said the young scholar proudly. "Our teacher is a hundred times better than that old Brahmin school-master and they all want to come. You'll have to begin at the beginning — Ah-ah, ee-ee, oo-oo, I, oh-oh, ow !"

"But my grandfather and grandmother won't let me come !" moaned Lakshmi. "If I cry for a whole day I'm sure that Grandpa will let me do what I like. He can't bear to hear me cry, but Grannie is terrible. She isn't blind like Grandpa. She follows me !"

"Oh, well," consoled Raj as Lakshmi sniffed. "Learning is not much good for girls. Soon you will be married and your mother-in-law will keep you busy

all day. I am going to drive a motor-bus, so of course —”

“You drive a bus ?” Lakshmi’s eyes opened wide. “But you must do what your father does —”

“There’s no special caste for bus-driving,” interrupted Raj, but before he could expound this further, a sharp call from the door sent Lakshmi scurrying off, while Raj fell briskly to work under the eye of the old lady.

“Pah ! How you smell !” she exclaimed, wrinkling up her nose in disgust. “What’s the use of my giving Lakshmi an oil-bath if she *will* come out here ? So you think you can read, do you ?”

“We put the roof on our school last night,” he answered her defiantly, lifting his basket of filth to his shoulder and pausing in the doorway. “When we get our new clothes for Pongal we shall —”

“New clothes for Pongal festival ?” she sneered. “What is the festival to you if you forsake the gods of our people ? School — *thu !*” She spat a stream of red betel in disgust. “Roof — *thu !* Not a yard of cloth do you get for Pongal nor a feast either. Let your precious teacher give you cloth and food.”

Raj remembered her words when, at some time in the night, they were aroused by a great hammering on the



door of their hut and rushed out to find the Chery lit up with a red glow. Flames rose from the beautiful new thatched roof of their school-house which they had completed with such pride only that evening. Frantically Young Uncle and Raj rushed off with pots to the nearest irrigation-well for there was no well in the Chery. Before they returned the school-house roof was a charred mass on the ground inside blackened walls, and the men were beating out the flame that had sprung up on the teacher's roof while the women and children wailed and wept in despair.

"Who did it?" rose the question from every side. Someone pointed to the group of washermen or dhobies, who stood in the lane with their little gray donkeys beside them, laden with great bundles of clothes.

"No, no!" denied the dhobies furiously. "Are you accusing us? We were on our way to the river to wash the clothes. We saw the fire and gave the alarm before you men on the yayttham saw it. Why should we do it?"

"You ask who did it?" The angry voice of the pariah priestess rose in the darkness. She stepped forward into the light of a flaring torch which one of the men held. Her dominant figure silenced the uproar.

Her face was convulsed with rage in its frame of dishevelled gray hair. "You forsake your gods whom you have worshipped and your fathers before you since the beginning. You pray to a new god; you refuse to bring offerings and observe ceremonies; you pay no attention to my words—then you complain if a punishment comes upon you! Fools!" She shook a long bony finger at Mottai who shrank back from her with fright on his dull face. "Did I not *warn* you that your children would sicken? Last night I prophesied that more trouble would come—"

"True! She prophesied right! The gods are angry!" muttered Mottai dubiously as the crowd wavered.

"A curse! The gods are angry!" went the verdict from lip to lip as heads nodded in the circle gathered about the crude flare of light. As if to confirm their fears a horned owl, the bird of ill-omen, uttered its mournful note in the tree-tops near by. At sound of that weird cry a shiver of foreboding went round the group. Raj stood paralyzed for a moment or two, anger struggling with fear in his mind. His voice broke the spell.

"Nynah! Uncle!" he cried, looking from one face to another. "I think the Reddy grandmother did it.

She made a threat when I told her about our school-house, only yesterday."

No one paid any attention to him. "What does it matter?" the Oldest One was asking dreamily. "Life comes and it passes. We work and we die. All will pass. Why strive against fate?"

The men shrugged their shoulders in affirmation. "All that labor wasted!" they lamented. "The blisters are not yet gone from our hands. All that labor for nothing!"

"No!" the teacher's voice rang out from the rear. "We won't be defeated! We'll build it up again for the festival!"

The men groaned and shook their heads. "Never!" they grumbled.

"Nynah! Teacher!" Raj's voice broke in a desperate sob, as he felt all his happy prospects slipping away. "Listen to me! The Reddy grandmother said that they would give us no food and no cloth for Pongal."

At last he had captured their attention. "What? No clothes for Pongal? Our rightful wages?" They turned about and made the boy repeat the old lady's words, their apathy swept away in a rising tide of indignation.

"Where are the people of the Oor ?" shouted Young Uncle, peering into the darkness. "They were here watching the fire, but they have gone away. They have burned our prayer-house !" His cry was taken up by other excited young men. "Let them try to stop our festival rice and our new cloth ! We have worked a year for it !"

"Be still !" begged the teacher, stepping forward now with his baby on his hip. "It will do no good to shout wild accusations —"

"We shall report them to the police at Senji !" Young Uncle insisted. "The Judge will make them pay a fine."

"You have no proof !" reasoned the teacher, shaking his head wearily, as the young men set up another clamor. "No one saw the fire lighted. No judge will believe your words without proof. How do you know ? Someone in the Chery may have done it."

"The leather-workers ! The priestess !" suggested the crowd.

"See ? There is no proof. We can do nothing."

"The teacher is right," Old Uncle asserted. "Will any judge take the word of a pariah against a caste man ? They will have a dozen false witnesses and we shall be put to shame. It is our fate."

"Don't anger the Reddys," counselled the teacher. "They are getting over their anger. They begin to send their children to school. We shall build the roof again somehow. They will not dare to stop your wages. If they do, you can all stop work."

The group digested this alarming suggestion in silence. Children fretted sleepily and were carried off into the huts. A rooster crowed loudly in the Oor.

"There is no more sleep tonight," declared Young Uncle, unwinding his cloth from his head and girding it around his loins for action. "Let us repair the teacher's roof. He is our friend."

The younger men and boys followed him with alacrity. The older men drifted off to their huts, shaking their heads and muttering doubts.

"Oh, Teacher !" called the Oldest One from his doorway. "You did not follow my advice about protecting your new house. You only prayed in it before moving in, so this misfortune occurred. When the school is rebuilt we must kill a cock on the threshold to keep out demons."

"Kill a cock ?" mocked Raj, throwing a bundle of thatch to Young Uncle and others who perched on the teacher's roof. "Truly we'll kill a cock for the

Festival and have chicken-curry." The boy felt light-hearted and full of hope again. Flames, demons, birds of ill-omen and all other night-terrors were fast melting away in the light of a new dawn.



## CHAPTER VI

### *JOTHY CELEBRATES HER FIRST CHRISTMAS*

**N**EVER in all her life did Jothy forget that first Christmas festival season, not only because of the joyful celebrations but because of events which changed the whole course of her existence. First there was the unexpected news that Lakshmi—her eleven-year-old playmate, Lakshmi, was to be married. She followed Jothy and Sundari to the pasture one morning to tell them the details, hidden by a cactus-clump from her family's watchful eyes.

"But only Brahmin girls are married so young !" exclaimed Sundari, staring at her incredulously. "Meena was fifteen. Why are you to be married when you're a little girl ?"

"He is my mother's brother's son," said Lakshmi, smoothing out her silk skirt, a little complacent at the girls' round-eyed awe. "He is reading in a big, big school in Madras — not like your school at all. Soon he will go on a ship over the sea to a bigger school in a foreign land. So it has to be finished quickly before he goes. He will come back rich and great. It is a very good match."

"Then the wedding will be coming soon ?" Sundari inquired eagerly.

"Not here," Lakshmi said, dashing their hopes. "It will be at my great-uncle's house in Madras because it must be done soon."

"Aren't you scared to leave your mother and your home ?" Jothy inquired, breathless at these undreamt-of wonders. "Have you new jewels for the wedding ?"

"My mother is coming with me and all the aunts and sisters and Grannie and everybody. We're going to ride in three carts to the Iron Path. *You* never rode on the Iron Path, Jothy ! We shall ride very fast to the big city. My father has taken another five thou-



sand rupees from the money-lender. The goldsmith is making me a gold belt and new bracelets and I shall get more jewels in the city —”

“What kind ?” broke in Sundari eagerly, her eyes full of envy.

“Oh, an emerald and diamond thiruvu to fasten in my hair, and diamond ear-rings like my mother’s, and a ruby pendant to hang from my nose over my lip, and a necklace of sovereigns —”

“A necklace of sovereigns !” sighed Sundari with longing. “That’s what I want when I am married. But my father says,” she added primly, “that it’s against the law for girls to marry under fourteen. He says the Judge could put your father in jail —”

“But it has to be done quickly before *he* goes,” insisted Lakshmi, taking up her interrupted tale with shining eyes. “What has the Judge to say ? The priests have declared the auspicious day.”

“Are you going over the sea ?” inquired Jothy, who had no idea what a sea might be.

“No.” Lakshmi’s face fell and she pouted a little. “I have to stay in his house —”

“Oh, Lakshmi !” crowed Sundari, a little spiteful in her envy. “You’ll have no more fun ! You’ll have a mother-in-law. Poor Lakshmi will be working. ‘If

the daughter-in-law breaks the pot, it is golden; if the mother-in-law breaks it, it is earthen.' Jothy, aren't you glad we don't have to be married?"

Jothy nodded doubtfully. After this glittering glimpse into a new world she looked distastefully at the buffaloes wallowing in the lake and at the muddy remnants of her own scant skirt. When Lakshmi departed on her original errand to the washerman, she trailed along behind her, stunned at the thought of bringing this exciting friendship to an end.

"This is my last day to wander," Lakshmi informed her further, as they crossed the peanut fields to the river-bed where the washermen were spreading sarees and loin-cloths on the sand to dry. "I am going to be married, so I have to stay in with the women. Oh, of course I shall go to the well for water and to the temple and to my relatives' houses but not out in the fields."

Her complacency wavered a little as they stood looking about at the familiar trees and roofs, the green, green fields beyond, the stony blue hills on the horizon. Near them the dhobies and their wives swung the wet clothes over their heads and slapped them rhythmically against stones which were worn smooth by many generations of their ancestors. The head dhoby stirred piles of steaming clothes in three mammoth pots over

a brick fire-place by the river-bank. His grandson, Murugan, grinned at Jothy who sat opposite him in school.

"You got three sums wrong!" he jeered, pointing at her. "I got them all right."

"Get to work!" admonished his grandfather, cuffing him. "The Reddy lady wants the clothes early for the journey and the wedding, and you talk about nothing but school. Will the little bride tell her father that I am ready to come to the city with you to dye the wedding-cloths? No, not you!" he interrupted his grandson, whose eyes started out of his head at the thought of going to Madras. "You can stay and do the work and go to your precious school. School, school, school!" he grumbled, pretending to be cross, but really very proud of the boy's learning. "We hear of nothing else."

Lakshmi blinked back the tears as she walked slowly homeward with Jothy following her. "I wanted to go to school, too!" she burst out in sudden petulance, burying her face in her arm. "Everyone goes but me!" She ran off into the Oor, sobbing more like a baby than a bride-to-be. Jothy did not see her again until the morning when all the Reddy women rode away in three carts, as gay as a flower bazaar. Lakshmi was

almost too stiff with silks and ornaments to move, but she smiled faintly at the crowding children who followed the cart as far as the pasture. Then she was gone. The master and his father and all the brothers, except one, followed a few days later, and were the first to return. In time the women returned, but no Lakshmi came with them.

Although the wedding was held in the home of the master's uncle in town, for the sake of haste, the master saw to it that the villagers were not deprived of their share in the feast. The Brahmin priest was given rich offerings at the shrine of Krishna to bring blessings upon the newly wedded pair, that no ill fortune might widow little Lakshmi and turn her bright prospects to tragedy. Even the outcaste servants received their special treat of rice and onions and curry-stuffs. In an excess of generosity the master killed goats for the curry. The teacher arranged affairs so that this feast fell upon the new festival, Christmas.

Moreover, the master consented to make the annual Pongal payments two weeks earlier than usual. He returned from Senji market with new cloth which he distributed to them all with their cash wages a few days before Christmas. Jothy hugged her mother's new red homespun saree to her, gloating in the clean

odor of it. She delighted in the rip-rip of cloth as Nynah and the uncles and cousins tore off their lengths of unbleached white for loin-cloths and turbans. Raj had his first real loin-cloth to wear on Christmas morning. He was so proud of it that he wore it hanging to his ankles like the caste men till the master ordered him to tie it up above the knees.

"Why are you getting ready for Pongal so early?" Poopathy, the leather-worker's daughter, inquired one evening when she found Jothy sweeping and sprinkling the ground in front of the hut. Nynah and Raj had carried in baskets of red clay from the lake bed and packed it down smoothly in a square at the threshold. The remainder of the clay Amma and Grannie mixed with water and painted as a border along the upper and lower edges of the outside walls. "You have white-washed your houses! You never did that before! Why, Jothy?"

"They're white inside and outside!" exulted Jothy, straightening up for a moment with her bunch of yellow broom-straws in her hand. "Our festival begins on tomorrow's tomorrow. All the week until New Year we have festival."

"But it isn't New Year at this time of year!" pro-

tested Poopathy. The Tamil years are quite different from the western calendar.

"It is for us Christians !" maintained Jothy stoutly. "We have to make everything clean and neat." She stooped to work again. The people hurried home from work to finish clearing away rubbish and cutting out the cactus which straggled into their street. The teacher's wife, a quiet little woman whom they had scarcely noticed, was now very much in demand. The women found her sewing clothes so skilfully for Sundari, Dahvedu and the baby that they longed to have their babies similarly clothed. Early and late she cut and stitched scraps of their homespun into baby-slips, gathered lengths of the same homespun into skirt-bands.

"You must learn to sew before next festival !" she protested. "I shall teach you one night every week."

The teacher's wife and Sundari sprinkled the red clay of their threshold with water and stooped over it with a handful of white flour in a paper cornucopia to make the intricate designs with which the caste women decorated their doorsteps. "Kolams in the Chery ?" queried the women, looking at one another doubtfully. "If we make them, the caste people will laugh at us !"

"Let them laugh !" declared the teacher's wife stoutly. "Your houses are as clean as theirs now, and our street is cleaner. Why not draw kolams to make it even prettier ?"

"Look, Jothy !" called Sundari jubilantly as she finished a kolam under Jothy's fascinated gaze. "It's the peacock pattern ! Isn't it pretty ?"

Jothy ran off at once to follow suit. Lacking flour, she crushed white pebbles into powder and rolled it in a leaf so that it would trickle out in a thin stream. She had watched the potter's wife and Padmini make kolams when she went to buy a pot once, and had studied the patterns in the Oor when she could get near enough. She made a pyramid of dots on the red earth before the door and tried to weave an intricate pattern of white lines and curves in and out among them, till there was a wavering and crooked but unmistakably festive design. Presently flowery designs bloomed on every doorstep. Pointed asoka leaves were threaded, points downward, on long strings and fastened across every door, while festoons of every kind of leaves adorned the insides of the huts.

"The men went to the weekly market at the highway and brought back so many things !" Jothy informed Poopathy when she came around to see the

decorations. "We have new pots, new brooms, oil for lights and for our hair, turmeric-roots, soap-nuts, everything! And oh, Poopathy! The master didn't give me a skirt so Grannie is going to tear off part of her new saree. She says it isn't suitable for a widow to wear a long, new one. And so I'll have a saree like a big woman!"

On Christmas Eve no one went to bed. The men were hammering, hammering mysteriously within the closed doors of the rebuilt school-house. The children tried unsuccessfully to peek in at the windows, then rushed home to watch their mothers light fires under brand-new clay pots and put the rice to boil. They hung about all night, gloating over the mutton, sniffing the curry spices and the onions, occasionally dropping asleep for a little while in a corner.

When the first cock crowed the door of the new school-house was flung open and they rushed in to find it transformed. It was so beautiful that Jothy's breath caught and tears came to her eyes as she gazed. Tall cocoanut fronds hid the walls. Festoons of leaves and chains of colored tissue-paper covered all the rafters, while bunches of yellow tecoma flowers and portia blossoms and pink oleanders hung over their heads and filled the air with sweet scent.



"Next year," the teacher was saying as they stood staring in the doorway, "we'll have zinnias and marigolds and morning-glories from our own garden, and we'll act a drama!"

But the children could not think of the future. Their eyes were fixed on the crowning beauty of the room—the row of festival lights that twinkled along the edge of the low mud platform, their white rag wicks greedily sucking up homemade castor-oil and burning in a blaze of glory. All this loveliness, just for them! As the teacher took up his fiddle, they carried the clay lights carefully in the palms of their hands and commenced to sing the new Christmas song, those without lights clapping the rhythm joyfully as they marched up the dark street

*Is this heav'n or is it earth?*

*Great God came to live among men!*

Out of the houses came the men, and the women carrying the babies, to fall into line behind the children. They were having a procession! They marched out into the lane. The leather-workers and the washermen came to watch them, and all the Oor people stood in the entrance to their street to see them go by,

# JOTHY CELEBRATES CHRISTMAS 121

just as they had so often stared at the processions in the Oor.

*Is this heav'n or is it earth ?  
Great God came to live among men !  
Born in a cattle-shed,  
Wrapped in rags on the straw —  
Not among the great and holy,  
He belongs to the poor and lowly,  
Ah ! How wonderful !  
Is this heav'n or is it earth ?  
Great God came to live among men.*



It was a wonderful day from beginning to end. Before dawn they were all at the lake, rubbing their skin with turmeric and washing their hair with soap-nuts which make soapy suds. They all appeared in their

new clothes; men newly shaven, women with their hair oiled. The Chinna-chery people arrived in time for the meeting. Jothy's excitement over meeting Jeeva Sister again was drowned in the general commotion that arose when a motor-car drove into their lane, warning people out of the way in two voices—"Cree ! Cree !" and "Honk ! Honk !" Before one could really look at it, it was upon one, and a white man was turning a wheel and shouting unintelligible remarks over the side of it. When it stopped, the door at the back opened and out came another white man — or was it a woman ? — and two small white-folks' children.

The people pressed up around this marvellous sight. Even the Oor people surged into the Chery. One of the white children pulled its funny little up-turned rice-pot of a hat over its eyes, clutched its mother's skirt and cried, just like any child. The crowd roared with delighted laughter. Jothy put forth a tentative finger to touch the child's soft, pink arm but drew it away hastily for she left a brown mark. How very raw and clean and fat they looked ! The bigger one was a man-child in tiny white leg-jackets who looked boldly at the people and ordered them out of his way in good, imperious language. "The woman's skirt and the little

girl's jacket reach only below their knees," Jothy remarked to Sundari.

"Frocks, stupid !" said Sundari wisely. "White women wear frocks, not jackets."

Their legs and feet were covered with something strange. Their eyes were sky-color, their hair like sand. Wherever they went, Jothy was in the front rank of the crowd that followed, gazing and gazing at every detail. All through the meeting in the new school-house, Jothy pressed up as close as she could to the mat on which sat the white people. A gray-haired Indian pastor who had also come in the car, called her up to kneel with her family and relatives while he put water on their heads and gave them their names. The white man laughed out suddenly when Old Uncle demanded to be given the name of the man in the Holy Book who had lived the longest. Jothy thought Methuselah was a wonderful name. She wished she had known of it in time to name Baby that, instead of Dahveedu after the goat-herd, David, in her favorite story. The teacher stood by, ready with names for those who wanted them. So Bald-head became Yovahn, which is John, and Lump-of-Dirt blossomed into Pushpa-raj, King of Flowers, his small round face

shining with pride as well as with the cocoanut oil which had dripped from his hair.

They shared their rice and curry with all of Amma's relatives who came over from Chinna-chery. Jothy was too much absorbed in watching the white people eat their meal in the school-house even to think of the feast to which she had looked forward. When the teacher shut the windows and door and ordered them off, Jothy and Pushpa-raj climbed up and thrust their heads through the space between the top of the wall and the eaves of the thatched roof. Suspended thus they had a good view, between the palm-fronds, of the white family who were taking queer food out of a basket and carrying it to their mouths on the end of shiny metal instruments. Before she had seen nearly enough, Jothy felt herself jerked backwards by her legs to the ground.

"Shameless girl!" Grannie scolded, winding the loosened three yards of homespun securely around Jothy's waist and over her left shoulder again. "This is a fine way for you to act before your maternal relatives! Will they want you in their family when you hang over walls and show your legs like a boy, and gaze at your betters when they eat?"

Jothy kept her eyes modestly on the ground while her maternal relatives ate and gossiped. There was not much left for the women when the men got through, but she was too much overcome by shyness to feel hungry. That tall boy who occasionally glanced at her and then looked away was her mother's youngest brother. She tied her cloth about her and tried to act exactly like the older women. When would they come for her, she wondered, and would she have any jewels at all ?

Some time after she had fallen asleep that night she awoke to realize that Old Uncle and Young Uncle were in the hut talking to Nynah and Amma and Grannie about her. She lay very still to listen.

"But that Jeeva of Chinna-chery is not married yet," Amma was pleading, "and no one seems to care. Why not our Little One too ?"

"A girl as big as Jeeva away from home !" Grannie grunted disapprovingly. "How boldly she talked to the white people, even to the man and to our teacher !"

"She is very learned," Young Uncle argued. "She knows the white-folks' language. That is the way to get power and money in these days, not to work like cattle the way we do. Let her go !"

"Will your brother wait while the girl goes off to school?" Mottai inquired dubiously of his wife. "She might learn until time for the wedding."

"Fool ! Blockhead !" chorused Old Uncle and Gran-  
nie. "When she is once a scholar, can you make her  
work in the mud and manure again ? She will be  
useless to her mother-in-law. When she is a scholar  
she must marry a scholar."

"We know no scholars—" Nynah began, but his wife  
interrupted him.

"That Jeeva is learning to be a teacher. In another  
year she will earn more than *fifteen rupees a month* !  
Her mother told me so ! What if our Jothy could  
earn that ? Our teacher will help us to find a hus-  
band."

Jothy lay very still. She realized that her fate was  
being decided. The white man had listened to all the  
children read, before he left. "Try hard for three  
months more," he had said to them. "I shall choose  
the best one to go to boarding-school in June." Sun-  
dari was already accepted at "the boarding." Jeeva had  
told Jothy and Sundari great tales of the life there.  
Would it be more fun to have a wedding or to be a  
scholar ?

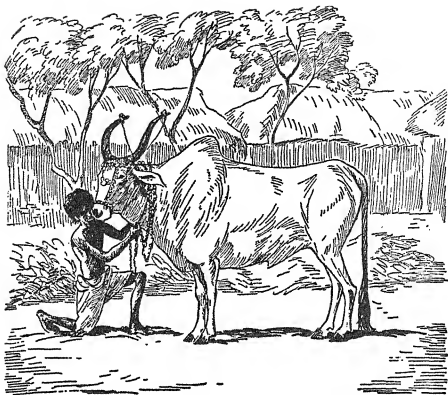
"The teacher says our Little One is smart," her

father declared doggedly. "She knows more than her brother — yes, he said so !" as an indignant snort from the other wall betrayed Raj's wakefulness.

"Let her go !" pled Amma again. "Let her escape from this fate that binds us all. My people can easily find another girl."

The matter was left there, but Jothy dropped off to sleep dreaming of the Iron Path and a world beyond where she might meet Lakshmi and play with those fat little foreign children.





## CHAPTER VII

### *RAJ MEETS WITH AN ACCIDENT*

**I**T WAS Raj after all, not Jothy, who took the first ride on the Iron Path, though the poor boy was in no condition to enjoy the experience. This was how it came about.

Before the leafy Christmas and New Year festoons had faded and fallen to the floor of the new school-house to be swept out with the dust, Karumboor was

filled with the bustle of preparation for the greatest Hindu festival of the year, Pongal, which is India's Harvest Thanksgiving. The potters toiled day and night at their wheels and kiln, making rice-pots and curry-pots and water-pots and saucers for little festival lights, for at Pongal every old pot is smashed and the festival rice is boiled in new pots. The leather-workers and washermen cleaned their huts and white-washed them, as the rest had done. The Chery was beautiful when every hut was white with festive stripes of red and kolams on the doorstep, like the Oor.

Every day the children mounted the hill by the lake to watch for cart-loads of Pongal guests, and then raced down to see who was coming home. One day it was the blacksmith's married daughter and her husband from a village on the other side of Senji; another day Meena and her husband arrived in the master's handsomest new bullock-cart. Daily Jothy looked for Lakshmi who must surely spend Pongal with her family. She longed for a glimpse of Lakshmi's new husband.

"Hi, Jothy!" Padmini, the potter's girl, greeted her one morning when she went to watch the pot-making from afar. "Lakshmi came last night. She did, too! Her father went to get her, and he brought her in the

night, and he brought a box full of sarees from the city for presents —”

“Lakshmi’s husband ?” interrupted Jothy eagerly.

“Chee ! Don’t you know ? He went over the sea right after the wedding. He isn’t here.”

Jothy hovered about trying frantically to get a glimpse of Lakshmi. One night a group of wandering singers and actors staged an entertainment in the street of the Oor. Raj and Jothy pushed their way into the crowd as far as they dared, in the darkness, and saw the scene where the monkey-god, Hanuman, helps Rama to rescue Seeta from captivity. In the crowd of women on the Reddy doorstep Jothy made out Lakshmi, looking very grown up in her saree, with her caste-mark changed from black to red since her marriage. Only once did she come near enough to Lakshmi to speak, and that was at the back door where her long waits were rewarded.

“I’ve had my bath, so I can’t come nearer,” Lakshmi called to her from within.

“How is it — in the city ?” stammered Jothy, eyes fixed on as much as she could see, through the crack of the door, of the bride’s new Pongal saree — a Benares silk of deep rose with a wide gold border.

“Oh, it’s — as it is,” replied Lakshmi non-commit-

tally. "I like the beach where we go driving, and I saw the cinema once—and here's a piece of rock-candy for you, Jothy! They're calling me."

Jothy wandered happily out to the pasture with her buffaloes, cracking her teeth against the sugar-crystals. They were harvesting the paddy in several fields, cutting it by hand with their curved short scythes and binding it in great sheaves to take to the flat rock which served as a threshing-floor. Nynah was driving the oxen around and around on it, to thresh out the grain, while Amma worked with the harvesters. The other fields were ripening fast. In the center of each hung a scarecrow of some sort—a straw man, or just a white-washed pot with black dots on it to attract to itself all evil influences and protect the crops. These scarecrows were for keeping off the Evil Eye. Raj and the other boys looked after the crows. He whooped at his sister from the distance, where he perched on a crude platform of bamboos in the center of a field of ripening paddy. "I stayed here with Young Uncle all night!" he boasted. "No, I wasn't afraid. I like it!"

There was one excitement after another that Pongal season. The goldsmith sent gifts of sugar to every family in the Oor to announce the birth of a son. There was a great celebration at Poopathy's house for

her baby sister's ear-piercing ceremony. Morning and evening Padmini, Parvati and other poor girls of the Oor went about from door to door collecting Pongal gifts in the usual way. They placed a yellow pumpkin blossom on a little pile of mud in the center, to represent God, and then performed the clap-dance known as kummi in a circle around it.

No one stinted money for charity at Pongal time. Knowing this, beggars poured in from other places and hung about the streets waiting to be fed. There were some very holy beggars in the salmon-yellow robes of ascetics, with sacred ashes streaked all over their bodies. One must fill their bowls with rice, or they would bring a curse upon the house. Some of the beggars twanged crude stringed-instruments and sang long, quavering songs about the gods, to which the children listened with interest.

It was cold and damp in the streets at night. Jothy would come into the hut shivering, her hair wet with dew, and crouch down close to the fire. Sometimes she burned with fever at night, but she was up and out all day in the warm, mild sunlight, not missing a single detail of the preparations.

At last came the great day when the Hindus set up their fire-places out of doors for "the Pongal" or boiling

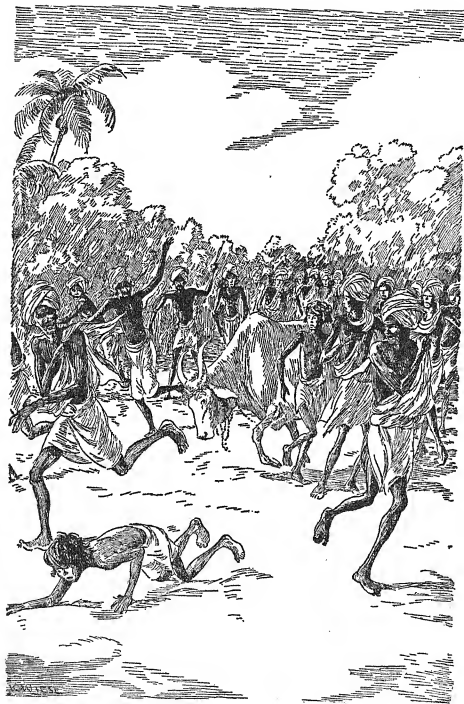
of the rice. The Reddys, as usual, emigrated to a grove of feathery vela trees a half mile away, with their families and their cattle. Before sunrise they had all rubbed their bodies with oil, bathed, washed their hair, and made their way to the grove. Jothy followed them at a distance, trying to get a glimpse of the proceedings. Hidden behind a bush she watched the great bonfires flare up, burning the worn-out mats and rags and dirty pots of the old year. Everything was new for Pongal.

The children frolicked gaily through the grove in their bright new silks, while their mothers and aunts blew the fires under the great new caldrons. When the rice was bubbling they all paused to offer sugar-cane and perform their worship to the Sun-God, who had blessed them with a good harvest. Jothy wandered home by way of the river-bed. The dhobies were all picnicking too, on the bank of the river, the potters and barbers in front of their houses. Everyone was feasting. The animals all attended the picnic and had their share, not only of food but of ceremony, for the men dipped leafy boughs in rice-water colored with turmeric, and ran around the herds sprinkling them, with incantations to ward off pestilence.

It was on Cow Pongal, two days later, that Raj met disaster. The cows and bulls have a celebration all

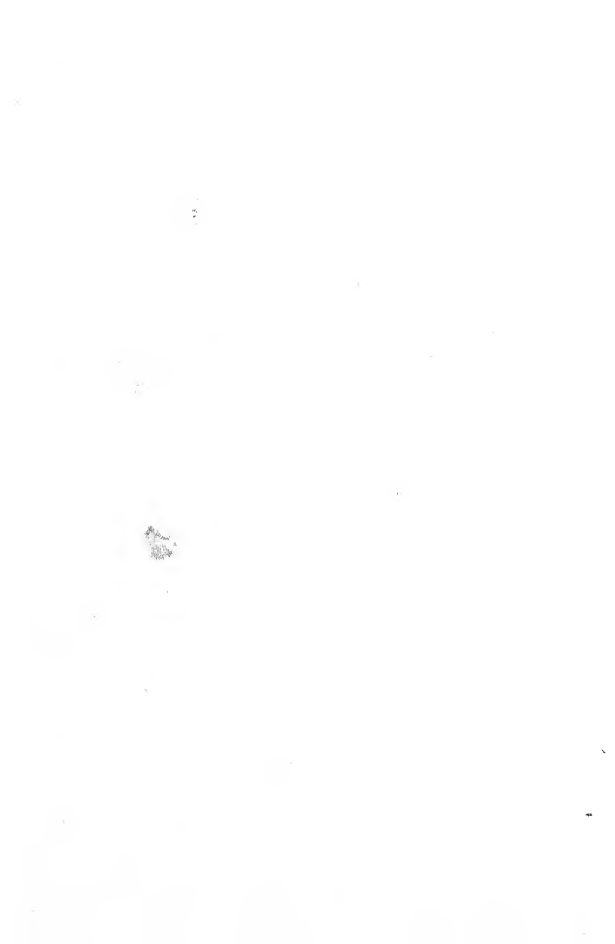
their own, in token of their great importance to the village. Raj had been busy, with the other men, scrubbing the master's cows and bulls in the lake, putting garlands of leaves around their necks and coloring their horns a bright blue or red with paint. He had taken special pains with Gopal, the new young bull which was their pride. Gopal's white hide was streaked with the scarlet paint which the boy had spilled in an effort to smear those tossing horns. He stood still just long enough to let Raj fasten a string of large blue and yellow china beads around his neck, for leaves infuriated him. Gopal was a beautiful young animal — sleek and white, with a hump and a dewlap. He tossed his scarlet horns as if he knew that this was his special festival, after the toil of drawing the master's cart.

Standing with the men at the edge of the grove that afternoon, Raj was delighted to see that Gopal was the bull chosen for the great chase. The Reddy men were merry now with toddy. They tied a beautiful muslin scarf, with a wide gilt border, to Gopal's horns. Whoever could get that scarf might have it. Raj gazed longingly at the fine bit of cloth. He imagined flinging it about his shoulders, with the gold border hanging over his chest, like the master's son, Krishna Reddy. Feeling his restless movement his father gripped his



*Gopal lowered his head and charged the crowd*





shoulder. "You are only a boy," he warned. "You are not to try."

Young Uncle and the other men were girding up their loin-cloths to join the chase after the bull had passed the borders of the vela grove. The young caste men stood ready under the feathery trees, while the older men goaded the bull with sharp sticks and shouted to anger it. Gopal tossed his head trying to shake off the encumbrance that bound his horns. He snorted with sudden pain at the thrusts of pointed goads, whirled about confused by the yells of the villagers, lowered his head and charged into the crowd.

They fled screaming, leaving a path down which he galloped, blind with rage and bewilderment. The men chased after him, trying to seize his tossing horns. Raj wrenched himself from his father's grasp and joined the chase. If he could once come abreast of Gopal he felt sure that the bull would know his voice. One man after another dropped out, but Raj ran on. He took a short-cut across the peanut fields and headed off the terrified creature near the river.

"Gopal!" he panted. "Gopal! It is I!" But Gopal was too wild now to distinguish his little friend from his tormentors. Just as the boy reached out a

hand to grasp the prize, he lowered his head and thrust those gay horns right into the boy's body.

"Someone has been gored !" the cry went up from the crowd. "Who ?" The mass surged forward, trampling the peanuts. Jothy and her mother were among them, curious and horrified, but they had been too far back to see what happened. They did not know who it was until they heard Nynah's and Young Uncle's voices lifted in wild lament:

"My son ! My son ! Are you dead ?"

Then Amma became a wild thing. She thrust the baby into Jothy's arms and fought her way madly through the crowd which opened, sympathetically, to let her through, then closed up again. Jothy's screams and queries passed unnoticed in that mob. She was too little to reach the front. She only knew that something had happened to her beloved Big Brother.

"Aiyo ! Aiyo ! Alas !" wailed Amma's voice, shrill and clear above the din. "What have they done to my boy ? My beautiful boy !"

Most of the women took up the cry, wiping tears of sympathy from their eyes. They pushed Jothy forward to follow the mournful procession that now started home, Nynah and Young Uncle and Old Uncle at the head of it, bearing a bundle wrapped in reddened

cloths. At the thought that Brother was dead, Jothy screamed and tore her hair with her one free hand, as Amma was doing, until Baby howled too: but Raj was not dead. He lay moaning on the floor of the hut while the people crowded the doorway offering advice.

Even the Reddy grandmother sent over a sort of paste made of herbs, to put on the wounds, and the neighbors brought in margosa leaves and turmeric and mud for a plaster to stop the bleeding. Jothy crouched in a corner, still holding the frightened baby, her eyes fixed on Brother's tormented face. In the midst of the nightmare she saw the teacher push his way in and squat beside the boy with a bottle of brown medicine and more white cloth. He insisted that the boy must be taken at once to the town.

"We can take him on the train and carry him to the hospital. I know the doctor well. He is a very clever white doctor. He has cured many such wounds at every Pongal," he pled over and over again.

For a long time Old Uncle and Grannie refused to consent. They sent for the pariah priest but he could only exorcise devils, not heal such wounds as this. "If it is his fate, let him die here at home," said Grannie stubbornly, while Nynah beat his breast and sobbed aloud, and Amma knocked her head against the wall.

At last the teacher won his way. The boy was carried out and placed on straw in one of the master's carts. Nynah, Amma, Old Uncle and the teacher went off with him into the darkness while the villagers wept and beat their breasts in sympathy.

"A hospital is a terrible place!" said one of the men who had travelled. "They will cut him with shining knives. He will surely die."

But the teacher's wife said quite the opposite as she tried to comfort Jothy with a handful of brown sugar. "A hospital is a wonderful place. They will make him well. Fear not!"

Jothy crept off into the littered hut, clasping Little Brother to her side, too miserable to eat any of the sugar which she gave to the hungry baby. Grannie was just gathering up the pot of cooked porridge which they had not had time to eat, with a cocoanut and some betel leaves which she had obtained somehow. She called Jothy to follow her to the shrine under the peepul tree, where the rough stone forms of the Chery gods stood like shadows in the starlight, surrounded by the yellow pumpkin-blossoms of the Pongal offerings.

"The gods are angry because we deserted them for a new god," she wailed. "The new god was powerless

to stop them. They have killed our boy, the light of our eyes !” She forced Jothy to her knees and handed the offerings to the priestess who broke the cocoanut and laid the porridge on the platform. Jothy set Little Brother down and clasped her hands fervently together, and prostrated herself face downwards on the ground as Grannie did, sobbing out terrified prayers for Brother.

When she stood up again she looked away from the gruesome images, up into the branches of the tree. A rustle of wings in the branches was followed by a sudden dismal cry—then a huge black form flapped away over the roof of their hut in the starlight. That set Grannie and the villagers to wailing and beating their breasts again.

“He is dead !” they moaned. “The bird of ill-omen was on your house ! That means death !”

Jothy was too worn out to cry any more. Shuddering with horror and grief she clung to Grannie’s skirt as they went into the hut and shut the door, laying poor frightened Baby in his cloth hammock and rocking him to still his cries. The bird of doom had spoken, and that meant death. Raj would never come back ! She had no Big Brother any more.



## CHAPTER VIII

### *JOTHY WRITES A LETTER*

THE OWL OF DOOM did not know what he was hooting about. The teacher came walking back from the highway, three days later, followed by Old Uncle and Nynah, with news that the boy would probably live. All Jothy's efforts to learn something of the Iron Path and that mysterious world known as "the hospital" only elicited mutterings and shakings of the head from her father and uncle. They had little to say as they took their places on the threshing-floor.

"They give rice porridge instead of millet porridge to eat at the hospital," Nynah admitted, after many questions from the rest. "The woman complained of indigestion after it. She had to stay because the boy is on a high bed and she fears he may fall off it. We lifted him down to lie on the floor, but the Doctor was very angry — oh, very angry!"

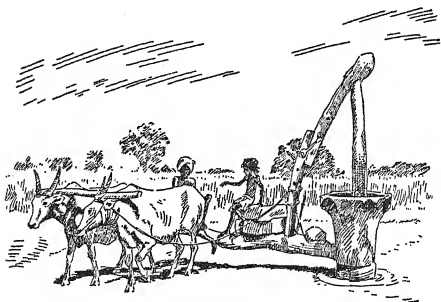
"Such fussing!" complained Old Uncle, holding a mooram of threshed grain over his head and shaking it skilfully to winnow it. The chaff blew away and the yellow grain fell in a stream to his feet. "I spent an anna to get the boy appams in the bazaar because he likes them so much, but that runt of a girl, with a cap on her head, ordered me out. The boldness of her!" he grumbled, relapsing into silence again, and that was all that either of them would say. When Grannie heard of the high bed and the runt of a girl, she was all for setting out at once to bring the boy and his mother home where they would be safely cared for, but the family settled down to its round of work and this purpose was given up.

The peanut harvest interfered with Jothy's schooling for a time. Grannie came to the field to take Amma's place. They squatted on their haunches all day in the burning sunlight, digging and pulling up peanuts to



fill their baskets, until their hands were blistered. Little Brother toddled about between the rows, his mouth forever dripping bits of raw peanut which Jothy fed him to keep him happy. She chewed nuts herself to appease her hunger until the very sight of them sickened her.

Old women sat all day by the flat rock where they dumped their loads, cracking the shells with bamboo flails and filling up sacks with the nuts. Sack after sack was loaded into the carts and driven off to Senji market by Young Uncle and the other men. Young Uncle made so many trips to Senji with rice and sugar-cane and peanuts and gram that he grew



fat and sleek and talked boldly to his elders. When the teacher wrote to ask the tassaldar, a Government officer, for a well for the Chery, he asked also that some waste land be assigned to Young Uncle and the other men to till and finally own for themselves. They waited eagerly for a reply, but the weeks dragged by and none came. Between trips Young Uncle had the master's oil-mill repaired by the carpenter, and began to make peanut-oil for the Reddy ladies to store away and use in cooking. Sometimes Jothy ran away for a time from the peanut field to watch the oxen plod around and around the wooden mill, turning the wheel which crushed the nuts with an agonizing squeak of wood on wood. Under a tamarind tree near by the blacksmith and his sons turned the wheel which blew his great bellows, to make bullock-shoes and trowels and crow-bars and spades. As the harvest proceeded, each family in the Oor stored up its supplies for coming months in dozens of clay pots, piled one on top of the other from floor to ceiling. The huge brick granaries in Rama Reddy's house were full to the top with yellow grain.

"Wait till we get our own land," muttered Young Uncle. "We shall store away supplies too. This meager daily handful is only for slaves."

One morning in February there was a clink-clink and a cry from the edge of the peanut fields. Jothy jumped up with the rest to see the mail-runner jogging along with his bag of mail. She had seen him come to the Oor where he stopped once a week with letters for the Head-man or one of the Reddys, and now he sometimes came to the teacher's house in the Chery. To-day, however, he was calling for "Mottai Yovahn of Karumboor Chery." That was Nynah ! Could Nynah have a letter ? Nynah was off ploughing the fields for the millet crop. Grannie seized the precious bit of paper from the mail-runner after he had persuaded her that it was really for her son. The harvesters crowded around to look at it. She felt of it and turned it over and over again.

"There is no one to write to us !" she exclaimed. "It must be a mistake !"

"No, it is for you, and the postmark says 'Jeyanoor,' " insisted the mail-carrier, hoisting his canvas sack to his head and picking up his bamboo staff with the metal rings that clinked as he ran to frighten snakes from his lonely path. "You can get the teacher to read it."

"Here, Little One !" said Grannie, holding out the letter to Jothy. "You can read. See what it says."

Jothy gazed at the picture of the King in one corner,

like the picture in the school-house, and at the scrawl beneath it. The marks took on a familiar look. "There's a 'koo' and there's a 'boo'!" she exclaimed, pointing at them with her finger.

Grannie snatched the letter from her impatiently. "What do they teach you then," she asked impatiently, "if all you know is 'koo' and 'boo'?"

The master grumbled but let them pass when he encountered Jothy with her father and grandmother, all trembling with excitement, on the way through the lane. "Jeyanoor is where the boy is," he reminded them.

"Oh, then he's dead!" shrieked Grannie, tearing her hair. "My beautiful grandson's dead!"

When the teacher had put on his spectacles and taken the precious paper from their hands and slit it carefully open with a broom-straw they stood, paralyzed with apprehension, on his porch to listen.

*"To the honored and respected husband whom God has graciously given me, I, your humble wife Kamala, send greetings by God's grace."*

"From my wife!" gasped Nynah. "But she knows not writing."

"Someone wrote it for her," suggested the teacher and then, impelled by Grannie's impatient grunts, went on:

*"Here we are all well, by God's boundless love and favor. We pray that you are well also. The boy, Raj, suffers pain from his wounds. They give him nothing to eat, only milk and juice of fruits."*

"Aiyo, alas !" wailed Grannie. "Said I not that we should bring him home ? Juice of fruits !"

*"He cries for food. The air and water of this place do not agree with me. The Doctor says he must remain another month. Never a moment passes that I do not think of you and my mother-in-law and my precious little ones. Bring them here to see me. I think of you and weep. Come quickly ! Do not delay ! This letter is from your sad and obedient wife,*  
*Kamala."*

"We must go at once !" sobbed Nynah, wringing his hands. "They call us. Let us go at once !"

"Wait !" interrupted the teacher. "Wait ! There is more writing here." His lips moved silently as he read, then he looked up. "You need not go. This letter was written for your wife by Jeeva — Murugan's

Jeeva of Chinna-chery. She is in the 'boarding' in the same town as the hospital. She writes:

*"Do not let this letter frighten you. The boy is getting well fast. The Doctor and nurses take good care of him. He has everything he needs. Your wife is well. She feels homesick but she has what she needs. Do not come until a month has passed. If any trouble comes, I shall write again.*

*Jeeva."*

Jothy secured the precious paper and hid it in her reader. Again and again, at school, she took it out and pored over it, trying to spell out the words for herself. The teacher found the sound-symbols which she did not know in the end of the First Reader and in a new copy of the Second.

"Learn quickly, and perhaps you can write an answer yourself," he urged.

When the master sent her back to herd goats again, she took her slate and her reader along, wrapped in the end of her short saree. The other children laughed when they found her hidden behind a bush on the hill-side copying sentences out of the reader, her stub of a slate pencil gripped between cramped fingers. She remembered what Jeeva had said at the Fort. The

letters were like beads on a string. She could put them together in strings of sounds to say things. She could say something to Big Brother who lay on a high bed far away and cried for food. She would send a letter with some peanuts by the mail-carrier who would run, clink-clink, all the way.

"Jothy has nearly finished the First Reader!" the teacher announced one night as the school assembled. "She has a thirst for learning. She will go into the Second Reader before any of you."

Jothy hid her face happily behind her slate as the children stared at her. They stood in two parallel rows facing one another along the walls of the school-house — boys on one side and girls on the other. Near the door, at a safe distance, stood the six little boys and Rukku from the Oor. A beautiful new lamp hung from the central rafter, with a glittering round top over it. The children had never seen such a dazzling light before. The teacher fed it out of a tall tin with expensive "Earth Oil," as they called kerosene. Its rays shone out through the open doorway into the night, attracting myriads of gnats and moths and beetles which beat their lives out against its chimney and fell into the flame to die in a gust of smoke.

While they did "mental sums" Jothy held her slate

carefully so as not to erase the letter which she had written on one side of it. After school tonight she would show it to the teacher and ask him how to get it to the mail-carrier.

"How many goats would he have left?" Teacher's voice broke in upon her meditations. Jothy awoke with a start, scribbled an unintelligible numeral on her slate at the order "One!" stooped to lay it face downwards at "Two!" and straightened up with folded arms at "Three!" Her pride tumbled when the teacher came down the line and drew a large goose-egg on her slate with his chalk while the children tittered. She was so overcome with shame that her slate soon displayed a row of zeros, and the letter on the back was smudged with her tears. The children chanted the *Poetical Precepts of Avvai* after Sundari tonight, instead of after Jothy, for Jothy had moved down to the bottom of the class. She listened miserably while they sang, digging her small brown toes into the packed earth of the floor. It was when they had gone as far as:

*Never utter "Chee!" in scorn,*

that the mail-runner appeared in the doorway and looked questioningly at the teacher, who threw out his hands in a gesture to indicate that he had no letters to



send. Jothy's mind worked quickly. There was no time to show her letter to the teacher.

"Sir ! Mail-carrier, Sir !" she called, running out of the doorway and down the path of light after him. "Will you put this carefully into your bag ?" she asked as he turned. "Give it to my brother who is in the hospital on a high bed. It's a letter."

The mail-runner turned her slate over and then burst into a loud guffaw. "What a jungle child ! A letter on a slate ! Where is the stamp—the king's picture ? Teacher !" he called, as the teacher's tall form was silhouetted against the doorway. "She asks me to carry a letter on a slate !" His shouts of laughter floated back to them between clinks of his staff-chains as he jogged away.

Jothy seized her skirt and wiped the derided letter off her slate before the teacher could take it from her. She could not meet the grinning faces of the children but darted home to fling herself down on Nynah's knees outside the hut, and hide her face against his hairy chest. All her toil had gone for nothing. She had gripped her pencil till her fingers ached. She had copied the beginning and the end from Jeeva's letter and had pieced together some new sentences by following the teacher or Sundari around to ask, "How do

you write 'tree'?" or "How do you write '-ing'?" until they lost patience with her.

Now it was all of no use. The slate was blank. Amma would have been so proud to get a letter — not written by the teacher but by her own little girl. It was gone. Although the teacher begged her to rewrite it the next day, and even tore a sheet of paper out of the back of the attendance register to copy it on, and offered to paste a cover and supply a stamp for it, she said she could not. The letter was gone.

The mail-runner was still chuckling when he returned, the following Wednesday, but he brought a message to the teacher which put a stop to the children's teasing. The message was from the Senji pastor, who had come on Christmas Day, and it said that all boys and girls who wanted to take the examination to enter boarding-school might take it at Senji on the following Saturday.

After days of feverish preparation by the children and heated arguments among the parents, the teacher set forth Friday night with Jothy, Pushpa-raj and Perumal all tucked into various crannies of a load of peanuts which Young Uncle was taking to market. They spent the night chanting the Poetical Precepts and the multiplication-tables and the letters of the al-

phabet in wild excitement, rousing the teacher at intervals to ask him something which they had forgotten.

"It is the first time they ever held an examination," the teacher muttered sleepily to Young Uncle. "What can they ask these babies who have scarcely finished the First Reader? Could they not let me choose the best?"

But Young Uncle was puffed up with pride as they drove into Senji at dawn. He steered his bulls to the pastor's house with many flourishes of his whip, and bragged to the other cart-drivers, "My son goes to write an examination! You ought to hear how much he can recite without taking a breath—more than a Brahmin boy. Ho, Pushpa-raj!" he admonished, seizing the boy by the ear as the children jumped down and brandishing his whip over him. "You write carefully and pass the examination, or this is what you will get. Mind the honor of our family. You too, Jothy, though, being a girl, you are not to be blamed if you fail."

It was not the Poetical Precepts nor the alphabet nor even the multiplication table that made an examination, the children discovered when they sat with rows of children from other villages on the cement floor of the

Senji church and stared at the white sheets of paper which a white man laid in front of them. In their hands they held strange pencils of yellow wood, with fine black points which broke as soon as one pressed upon them. Jothy stared at the pictures and the black lines of print in a daze, then looked at the others for support. Pushpa-raj's round face was puckered with bewilderment. He wore a large khaki shirt which was Young Uncle's proudest possession, but the boy's hands were lost in the sleeves until the pastor rolled them up for him. He gazed at Jothy in mute appeal, but she was too far away to be of any help. She chewed her pencil and concentrated on her paper again. There were pictures with writing. Familiar syllables began to emerge.

"Read what the paper says and do it!" their teacher urged, encouraging them from the doorway beyond which he and the other teachers waited. "Think well!"

Jothy gripped her pencil and leaned forward with an elbow on the cool cement. She wrote the names under the pictures, as the print directed. If only she could hold her own little slate in the crook of her left elbow, she could do anything. She gripped the point

a new way and tried a new problem. It was fun to supply the missing parts of a cart without a wheel, a goat with two legs, a mortar with no pestle, a monkey with no tail. She traced a path out of a maze, but before she finished they snatched that paper away and laid another down. Pushpa-raj's face was still as blank as his paper. A little girl from another village was sobbing loudly.

"What kind of examination is this?" one of the teachers asked the pastor in an angry undertone, but the pastor only shrugged his shoulders, with a look at the white man who held in his hand a round object that ticked. "Begin!" he cried, and they turned the papers over. Ah! Here were familiar numbers to be added and subtracted. Even Pushpa-raj broke three points in his eagerness to show what he knew. Fingers and toes worked hard. The teachers were kept busy sharpening pencils. Jothy shifted her pencil in an effort to make the numbers stand up, but her 8's still lay on one side, and her 3's turned boldly around.

After a recess during which they collected green tamarinds from the great shade tree in front, they met their hardest test. All the little girls sobbed as they looked at the last paper, and the teachers' faces were

cross. "Do what you can!" the white man urged, coming around to pat them on the head. "It's not hard."

Jothy giggled aloud at the little story that was printed at the top of the page. It was a Thennal Raman story, such as Grannie told. The questions were easy. One just strung the syllables along to make the answer. It was like writing that letter. That letter! Jothy could hardly believe her ears when she heard the next direction, "Try to write a little letter, or write anything you wish."

The letter to Raj, over which she had toiled, came back to her mind. She had thought it was gone, rubbed out completely, but as she took a new grip on her pencil, it came back. She strung the syllables together. The lines sprawled slantwise across the page. The letters grew bigger and bigger as her hand grew tired. She could not remember the beginning and ending but she made some sentences:

*I am well. I hope you are well, by God's boundless love. We picked all the peanuts. Nynah planted millet. Come home soon, Big Brother.*

Jothy's arm still ached with the cramp when she ran back into the church some time after they were dis-

missed, to ask the teacher a question. She stopped abashed at the sound of the white man's reading aloud her letter to the assembled teachers.

"See what a child can do if she's taught properly !" he was saying.

"Here she is !" Her teacher seized her with a proud smile — so different from the cross looks with which he had dismissed them. Poor Pushpa-raj was crying yet, with his father's shirt hanging below his knees so that he could not climb the tamarind tree.

"Whom was the letter for ?" the white man was asking kindly, but Jothy was too much overcome to face all these strange men, and hid her face in her arm, while the teacher told the story.

"Oh, the boy who was gored by a bull ?" the white man asked. "I saw him when I went over to Jeyanoor hospital, and your mother too. I'll bring them in my car when I come to Karumboor. The train journey is so roundabout. Shall I take him this letter ?"

"Jothy has passed ! Jothy has passed !" the word went around Karumboor-chery next morning when they returned. Nynah pinched her cheeks, beaming with pride. Grannie cuffed her affectionately. The neighbors came in to hear all about it. Even the

Reddy grandmother shouted to her when she went to fetch the goats:

"What's this I hear? All the boys failed and a girl passed. You're going away to school?"

"The order has not come yet," Jothy mumbled bashfully.

"You're going to be so proud that you permit the cattle to graze in the millet!" warned the old lady.

Jothy wished she could tell Lakshmi of her triumph, but Lakshmi had returned to Madras after Pongal.

"Chee!" shouted Pushpa-raj when he rode past her down the lane on the back of the biggest water-buffalo. "Chee! I don't want to go to school where a teacher will beat me! You can go, for all I care!"

"'Never say 'Chee!' in scorn!'" yelled Jothy above the trampling of the animals' feet, flinging a Poetical Precept at him in the same breath with a Moral Tale, "The fox said, 'The grapes are sour.'"

Now that it was fast becoming a reality rather than a dream, she was uncertain whether she wanted to go to school. The goldsmith and his family set off on a journey to the sacred shrine at Tirupati to fulfil a vow made when they were praying for a son. They would ride on the Iron Path and then climb thousands of steps



to the top of the sacred hill, and shave off all their hair before the god. When the pilgrims started, the children followed them almost to the highway, joining happily in the shouts of "Govinda ! Govinda ! O-o-o-oh !" with which they praised Krishna as they walked. A pilgrimage would be far more fun than going to school, and bring merit too.

On the way back from the highway they encountered a gypsy encampment and stopped to watch those easy-going, good-humored people cooking in their tiny tents. "Bird-catchers !" they called them. The gypsy women jingled all over with shell necklaces and horn bracelets, and looked very gay in their piebald clothing. They offered to tattoo designs on Jothy's wrists and forehead. Jothy was strongly tempted, but she had no pay to offer. She stared at them enviously and wished that she might sleep under a yard of canvas in a new place each night. That would be far more exciting than school.

They stopped to explore a grove filled with clay images of horses, but Pushpa-raj would not linger long.

"It is nearly noon, and Iyenar, the guardian god, will mount a horse and ride at noon. It is dangerous for the oldest son of the family to be here," he explained to his cousin, quoting his mother. "Moreover, that stupid

Perumal may have let our animals wander. Chut-poot ! Let us run !”

Events rushed upon Jothy so fast, however, that she could not decide the matter of school or no school for herself. Amma was determined that she should go, when she came riding home with Raj in the white man's motor-car. Amma wore a new blue saree and carried her old red one in a bundle, while Raj wore a shirt over his loin-cloth which he pushed up to show his precious scars to an admiring audience as soon as the car stopped. Jothy hung back, a little afraid of these strange people. Amma had her hair smooth and not fuzzy, and they both looked different.

“How fat you are !” everyone exclaimed. “They fed you well,” hastily changing to “How thin you have grown !” as discretion took the place of surprise, for praise would attract the attention of the jealous evil spirits. Amma was out of the car in a minute and had Jothy and Little Brother in her arms, with tears streaming down on them, as she kissed them. “How thin you are ! How miserable you look !” she took care to say to each of the family in turn, hoping to deceive the spirits. Raj broke loose from Grannie's frantic embrace and surveyed the village. He was so tall ! “This really is a jungle place !” he remarked disdain-

fully, as the children followed him. "In the town the smallest houses are like our Oor, and the hospital was the biggest house of all."

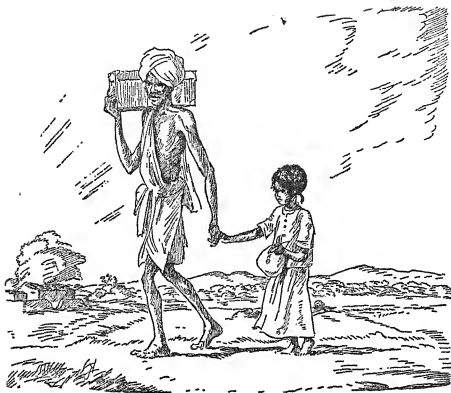
"It is good to be free from forever pouring water over myself," was all that he would admit in words that night, though deep and wordless joy filled the home hut as they sat about, united once more.

"Only to think of our Little One's writing us a letter!" marvelled Amma, squeezing Jothy with one arm and Baby with the other. "The white man showed it to everybody with pride! He said you were the smartest of all who wrote at Senji. When you go to 'the boarding—'"

"I'm not going to boarding-school!" announced Jothy sleepily.

Amma rocked her back and forth with a sort of crooning chant, "My Little One will go to 'the boarding' where the girls laugh and play as if there were no sorrow in the world. I saw them! My Little One will sit down every morning to a big dish of porridge, and every noon and every night to a plate of rice and curry like a Reddy's child!"

"All right!" agreed Jothy with a yawn. "I'll go, but Amma must come with me!"



## CHAPTER IX

### *JOTHY GOES TO BOARDING-SCHOOL*

JOTHY had to say good-bye to Amma, however, in that star-lit June dawn when she set off across the fields to boarding-school. All through April and May there had been doubts and discussions among the relatives who argued outside the hut at night. Jothy listened to each new decision with indifference, falling asleep with exhaustion on Nynah's knees after long hot days of searching for fodder for her goats and buffaloes.

The heat-monster was devouring the land like a great demon, with eye of flame, they called rakshasa. It sucked up every drop of water from the empty fields, leaving them in baked brown ridges. It scorched every green leaf on bush and tree, till they lay in withered heaps, to be tossed about by fitful flurries of sand. Soon after midnight the Chery people waited patiently with their clay water-pots by every mud-hole, trying to catch a little brown water that oozed up from beneath. The women of the Oor bought longer ropes and lowered their brass and clay jars till they knocked against the stone bottoms of the wells before they could get enough water to cook the rice. The yaytthams stood silent over empty irrigation-wells whose depths were hidden by green scum and fallen leaves.

Night after night sounded the drums of the exorcists trying to drive out the devils of disease that had entered the village. Sometimes a night of drumming would be followed by the terrible, wailing clamor that announced a death and soon a sad procession wound its way out to the burning-ghat in the sandy river bed, or to the pariah burial-ground.

The Chery people scoured the countryside for fire-wood and manure which they might sell to earn a handful of grain for the porridge-pot day by day.

Sometimes they ate it almost raw for lack of fuel other than leaves. They swept the dead leaves into empty grain-sacks to sell, and could not spare many for themselves. The children searched far and wide for cactus-fruit and green nelli-berries to fill the aching void within. Their ribs showed more and more clearly under their dusty brown skins, as did the ribs of the patient, starved cattle. It did not seem to matter much about the future. It was enough of a struggle to cope with each burning day of hunger.

Suddenly, in the first week of June, the red-eyed monster hid his face behind a gray veil and rain fell for the first time in five long months. The cooling drops bounced off the baked earth at first, but finally, after a night of thunder and rushing wind, the men got out their ploughs and went happily forth to labor. There would be steady work now, and millet in the porridge-pot each night. The hungry animals devoured each blade of grass as soon as it showed its head above ground. The washermen dug deep into the burning sand and uncovered a trickle of water in which to wash clothes once more. The teacher and his wife returned from their holiday visit to relatives in town, leaving Sundari and Dahveedu behind to go to school. Everything began to look brighter. After one final

argument the matter was decided. Jothy was to go to the boarding-school.

Getting ready to go was as exciting as preparing for a wedding. When Nynah had finally succeeded in wheedling a loan out of the master, Jothy became the proud possessor of more things than she had ever owned in her life. First there was a box, hammered together by the carpenter out of smooth white boards, with a cover on hinges that fastened down with a shiny black hasp. Old Uncle and Nynah returned from Senji with a pile of treasures — a white enamel plate, a wooden comb, a pink silk jacket (for Jothy, think of it!) a string of red beads, a small sleeping-mat of fragrant grass with scarlet border and green fringe at either end, a new slate and slate-pencil, and, most thrilling of all, a tiny padlock with a flat key.

Jothy locked and unlocked her box many times a day to reveal these treasures to Poopathy and Pushpa-raj and all the other neighbors, and to the relatives who came over from Chinna-chery to see the preparations. Amma took her new blue saree to the teacher's wife, who cut and sewed it into a full petticoat to billow about Jothy's ankles and an extra jacket of the same cloth. The teacher painted her name in beautiful black letters across the end of her mat and on the

cover of her box—Y. Jothy, the Y. standing for Nynah's Christian name, Yovahn.

"Our Jothy is going to become a learned scholar," said most of the relatives proudly, but there were some who shook their heads with disapproval. It was very strange that there should be a place for a girl in a school, when fine boys like Raj and Perumal and Pushpa-raj must wait for another year. "You will get no good of her learning," the men said dubiously. "Her husband's family will get the money she earns—not you!"

The moment of departure came at last, long before dawn on the appointed day. They must be well on their way before five o'clock for, on that particular day, the "unlucky hours" when no new enterprise could be safely started fell between five and seven. Nothing of ill-omen must be allowed to shadow this great occasion. Grannie cracked her knuckles affectionately along the sides of Jothy's face and covered her with tears and farewell kisses before she left the hut. She would not even come to the school-house for the teacher's parting prayer, for it would never do for the travellers to see a widow when starting out on a journey.

Most of the Chery people gathered at the school-house to behold Jothy in the glory of her new blue



skirt and pink silk jacket and red beads, with her unruly hair dragged back into a tiny pigtail that stuck out straight behind. Jothy herself found all these glories turned to dust and ashes when she had to say good-bye to the family at the edge of the lane.

She and Nynah set forth at last, she with her roll of matting on her head, and he with the box on his shoulder. She looked back at Amma and Raj and the rest longingly, resisting the impulse to run back and speak with them again, for it is most inauspicious to make a second start. Her eyes were blind with tears as she stumbled along the ridges between fields in the brilliant starlight. She did not cheer up till they reached Chinna-chery, five miles on their way, where they stopped to bid good-bye to relatives and to pick up Jeeva who was going with them to school.

Amma's people forgot their resentment at the broken wedding-plans and gave Jothy fried cakes wrapped in leaves for the journey. Jeeva was so full of tales about school, as they trudged on in the sunlight, that her spirits rose and she fairly danced through fields and sandy wilderness, impatient to get there.

"There!" said Nynah at noon, letting Jothy slide from his shoulder to the yellow dust of the highway.

"There is the Iron Path. Go and look at it ! She has talked of nothing else for days !" he added to Jeeva's brother who had come this far to carry her box.

Jothy ran up to the white gate of the railway crossing, forgetting her blistered feet and aching limbs and parched throat. There was the Iron Path at last ! The gleaming rails stretched out as far as the eye could reach on either side, seeming to meet and dance in a golden haze at their ends. On either side of the track marched spiky blue-green aloes so close together that no cattle could stray in front of the engine.

They turned off the road and walked down the track to the small stone station, Jothy jumping joyously from tie to tie, or balancing on a rail, picking her feet up quickly from the burning metal. Jeeva led them at once to a queer post on the station platform which spurted clean, cool water in unlimited quantities when they pressed it. Joyously they bathed their faces and legs and dusty feet and drank cupped handfuls of the delicious liquid, then sank down on the stone flags of the waiting-shed. Jothy unrolled her mat hospitably for Nynah, who shook his head and pinched her cheeks.

"The stones are good enough for me," he insisted,

stretching himself out with a groan, and untying some betel leaf from the corner of his loin-cloth. "Let the engine come when it will. We are here."

It did not come until the sun slanted into the west, but Jothy did not care. She had a long nap on the new mat, pressing her face against the sweet-smelling grass, undisturbed by cawing crows or whining mosquitoes or the tick-tick, tick-tick of the telegraph. A grandfather-monkey climbed over the black picket-fence at the back of the platform and almost stole the bundle of cakes from between them, but they awoke in time and he ran out to gibber back at all his relatives who perched on the branches of a tamarind tree and threw down green tamarinds at them.

Jothy spelled out the name of the station on the great white sign-board, and stared with awe at the strange letters beneath which she could not read. "The same thing in English," Jeeva said it was. Jeeva knew all about everything. When people strolled in as train-time approached and began quarreling for a place in front of the window in the wall, Nynah untied another knot in his loin-cloth and fumbled for two of the five silver rupees that reposed therein.

"One man's ticket," he shouted through the window,

"and two women's tickets — no, one woman and half a woman."

Jeeva pushed him aside and took his place by the window, as the crowd laughed. "Two and a half tickets to Jeyanoor," she amended.

"The price is too great," Nynah grumbled, squinting at the handful of silver and copper which he received. "Give me back more."

"No, no, Uncle !" Jeeva laughed, leading him away from the tittering people. "That's correct. You can't haggle for tickets, you know ! Let me take mine."

Jothy fled screaming from the engine when it snorted down the Iron Path, but Jeeva clutched her by the arm while Nynah hoisted the two boxes to his shoulders. They walked up the line of windows looking for a place, and climbed into one of the rooms into which the train was divided. Nynah and Jeeva squeezed themselves into a space on one of the crowded length-wise seats, while Jothy perched shyly on her box in the aisle between them. Before she had taken in her new surroundings a bell rang on the platform, there was a long whistle from the engine, and they were moving. She held tightly to her box as the station slipped past outside.

"Here, Little One !" said Jeeva, getting up to change places. "Sit here and look out."

It was wonderful to ride on the train. Jothy knelt on the seat and leaned her elbows on the window-sill, looking out at the fields and hills through a cloud of black smoke. There were yattthams going up and down over the irrigation-wells; there were children driving herds of cattle to pasture and stopping to wave at the train; there were women stooping over in the water to transplant new rice, just like Amma ! Suddenly her breath caught and her chest heaved.

"The Little One is crying !" exclaimed the plump, motherly woman on one side of her. "What is the matter ?"

The whole compartment was excited at the news that she had left her mother to go to school. The women untied their cloth bundles and brought out plantains or cakes to comfort her. Gradually her feeling of desolation passed off. Nynah had a terrible time to find the tickets when the ticket-collector came around at the next station. He untied all the wrong knots in his loin-cloth, took off his turban to look inside and finally insisted that they had put them in Jothy's box, but when they had emptied that out upon the floor, the lost bits of yellow pasteboard were not

to be found. Meanwhile the man in the white coat and "leg-jackets" waved his arms angrily and shouted at them as he punched everyone else's tickets. Nynah found the right knot at last, just in time to prevent their having to get off the train, and Jeeva agreed to take charge of the tickets after that.

At some time in the night they changed trains at the Junction where they had to wait for hours.

"Here we saw the first doctor, when we brought the boy," Nynah remembered.

It seemed to Jothy that they walked along miles of stone-flagged platform beside a long, long house full of doors and windows. Rows of people lay stretched on the pavement, their swathed heads pillowed on their bundles. Lean, mangy dogs nosed about looking for scraps, falling into noisy fights with each other. Bright lights streamed out from the rooms where men slept in chairs. The tick-tick of the telegraph blended with the chorus of crickets at the end of the platform. Red and green lights winked mysteriously at them down the line. Jothy was sound asleep on her mat when a great gong clanged and the station woke to life.

"The Mail has left the last station!" said Jeeva, hurrying them out to the edge of the platform. When the

gong clanged again, another great monster, much larger than the first, came snorting at Jothy out of the night. Sweetmeat sellers jostled them as they ran up and down the platform crying their wares to the passengers who leaned out of the windows. Crowds of people pushed and called and jabbered, walking up and down to find a place. Jeeva steered them into a compartment where there were caste people who drew away from Nynah as he approached. He looked about apologetically and stood at one side, but Jeeva pushed him down on the seat. "You have as good a ticket as anyone," she remarked boldly, and no one contradicted her. Jothy stared at a little Brahmin girl in orange silk and jewels who stared back at her from the opposite bench. She reminded her of Lakshmi. Had Lakshmi travelled like this, coming for Pongal? She leaned out of the window and gazed at the hurrying throngs. A man came by with rows of rainbow-colored bottles on a rack.

"Limlade ! Limlade ! Color limlade !" he shouted in English. The bottles fizzed as he pushed in a glass ball at the top. People tilted their heads back and poured the liquid into their mouths without touching their lips. A wedding-party crowded in, chattering gaily, the little bride stiff with ornaments as Lakshmi

had been, her flower-crowned head bowed in bashfulness under the smiles and questions of her fellow-travellers. Presently the gong clanged, a shrill whistle blew, the engine whistled long and mysteriously far up the line, the sweetmeat sellers blew out the flaring oil-lamps on their trays, and the long train slid silently off into the night.

It was nearly noon the next day before they reached Jeyanoor, after another change and long wait, and another ride on a small train. This last train was filled to overflowing with school-girls who giggled and chattered and sang songs. They pointed at Jothy and said "New Girl!" till she hid her face in Jeeva's lap for embarrassment. Even Jeeva deserted her and went off to sit with a row of her own tall friends. Jothy's eyes were full of coal-dust; her head ached from too much unaccustomed food and from all the noise and excitement. She followed Jeeva and Nynah in a daze as they climbed into a bullock-cart at the station with a crowd of girls, and rode slowly off through a strange bazaar.

"Mangoes!" shouted the girl at the back of the cart, bargaining with a boy who carried a basket of the luscious, yellow fruit. Someone threw one into Jothy's lap. She made a hole in one end as the rest did, and sucked the juice. She had never tasted anything so



good. She squeezed and sucked, and then tore off the skin and sucked the oval stone inside, while a stream of yellow juice dripped down her chin.

She was so tired that it seemed, after that, as if her mind detached itself from her body. Her body climbed down from the cart in front of a huge, white-pillared house on whose veranda were throngs of children with boxes and mats. Her body stood in a long line that waited outside a door. Her body opened her box and exhibited it to someone, exhibited legs and arms and eyes and head to someone else. Her mind floated far above, somewhere, vaguely conscious of all these strange happenings, but making rapid flights to Amma and the baby and Grannie and Brother, and her goats which someone else was herding—

“So this is one of the new children !” a strange voice was saying. She looked up to see a white face smiling down at her from beneath a wide pith hat—a face streaked by little rivulets of water that joined other rivulets which ran down her white neck under her blue frock. The lady’s hand seized hers and she was led off across a patch of sunlight, up the steps of another house and into a cool, shady room.

Jothy looked about her, still in a daze. It was the biggest room she had ever seen, with pretty mats on its

red-tiled floor, and so many chairs and tables that she felt afraid to move for fear of knocking something over. The lady took up a paper from a table covered with papers, and pointed her finger down a list of names. "Y. Jothy of Karumboor, Senji Parish," she read. "Is that you?"

Dully Jothy nodded, digging a bare toe into the woolly mat at her feet. The lady looked at Nynah who stood behind.

"All right, Father," she remarked pleasantly. "Her name is on the list of admissions."

Nynah fumbled in his loin-cloth and drew out the three shining silver rupees. These he held out with a respectful salaam. "Fees for six months," he said.

The lady took them with a smile and scribbled something on a paper which she handed to him. "A receipt," she explained as he stared at it. "A chit. Keep it."

Nynah slowly tied the chit in with the copper and silver left, and then looked up with his eyes blinking away tears. Jothy watched him with sudden, horrified realization that the moment of parting had come. Her last link with home would be broken.

"I go," he was saying to the lady. "You will take good care of her? She is very little. She never went

away from her mother before. She will cry." His voice broke. He took Jothy's right hand by the wrist and placed it in the lady's hand, which grasped it tightly. "She is not my child any longer," Nynah was saying solemnly. "She is yours; I give her to you." His voice broke again. "If she is lazy, beat her and make her study. Take special care of my child!"

Another father and daughter came in just then, so they had to go.

"She will be very happy. I'll take care of her! Go, and come again!" the Missie said to them at the door. They looked back to see that the other new pupil was putting a garland around the Missie's neck and handing her a yellow lime.

"Buffalo that I am!" said Nynah. "Why didn't I think of it? Will it make any difference, Jeeva? Shall I go and buy a garland and a lime now?"

"No, no!" laughed Jeeva. "What does she care for those things? She makes no difference between one child and another. Here we are all equal."

At the entrance to the dormitory, Nynah solemnly handed Jothy into the keeping of a plump gray-haired woman in a white saree, whom Jeeva called "Matron Amma." Sundari appeared around a corner, all dressed up in a new skirt and jacket of flowered print,

## JOTHY GOES TO BOARDING-SCHOOL 179

with a knot of chrysanthemums in her sleek black pigtail. She seemed very much at home already and promised Nynah to take care of Jothy. She was full of messages to send to her parents in Karumboor. "Tell my father that Dahveedu's school opened day



before yesterday and he is in Class Three." Jothy clung to her father as he started away, but he stopped and loosened her arm at the foot of the steps.

"I go !" he said, stroking her face with both hands and kissing his finger-tips. He seized her shoulder roughly. "Now mind ! You are not to bring any shame to the name of your family. You're to be obedi-

ent and good, and pass in all your examinations. Otherwise don't come home !”

Jothy stood speechless, as he turned away rubbing the back of his hand over his eyes, then a wave of desolation swept over her. She turned back at Sundari's call and carried her box into the dormitory. The long inner courtyard was full of laughing, scurrying children who knocked against her as she hesitated. The Matron led her to one of the small dressing-rooms that opened off from the courtyard veranda.

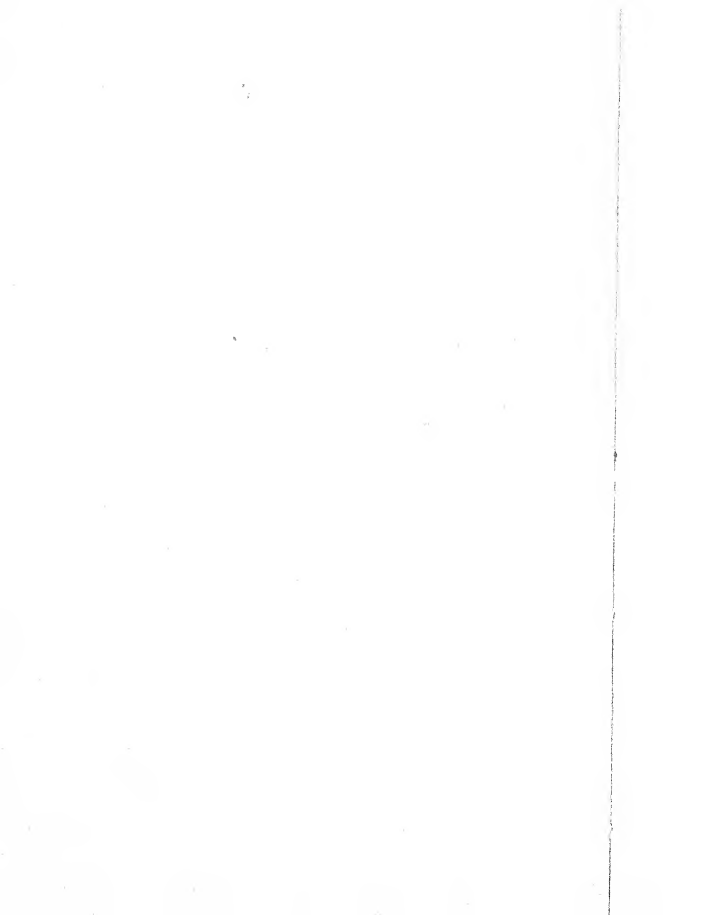
“Put your box on the lower shelf and your mat on the upper shelf,” she directed. Jothy slid her box into a vacant place in the row of boxes on the low shelf, the tears falling fast. Homesickness flooded her whole being, and soon she was weeping aloud. No one could stop her. The Matron pinched her cheeks and spoke to her soothingly, the children flocked into the tiny room to giggle and give her advice.

“Stop crying ! Stop crying !” they all said, but how could one stop crying when everybody was strange and the place was new ? She cried more loudly as she heard the alarming click-click of the Missie's shoes on the paved veranda outside, and her peculiar clipped Tamil as she came in:

“Matron Amma, have you sent those children with



*Jothy began to feel better*



sore eyes to hospital ? Why, who's this crying ? Little Jothy !”

Jothy pulled away from her grasp and flung herself down in the corner. None of these people could heal the ache in her heart and they need not try.

“It's past time for your food, children !” she heard the Missie say. “Run along and get your hands washed. Jothy, is your new plate in your box ?”

Jothy nodded. She had forgotten her possessions.

“Which is your box ? Is it this beautiful new one with Y. Jothy on it ?” Jothy looked up and pointed. “Have you a key to it ? Can you get your plate out ?”

Of course she had a key, tied securely around her neck on a bit of white string, under her necklace. “Your marriage-tali !” Big Brother had scoffed. She was up in a minute, opening her box and taking out the beautiful unused plate. Sundari led her away to the cemented square at one end of the rear courtyard to wash her hands and her plate in the water which a bigger child was dipping out of a large clay pot. Then they stood in the long line of children who moved along the kitchen veranda to get their plates filled. Two women who looked like village women, were ladling rice on each plate from huge wooden trays, and brinjal curry out of an enormous curry-pot. As she sat in one



of two long rows along the inner verandas eating it, Jothy began to feel better.

"This curry hasn't enough salt," complained the child next to her.

"The spices are not mixed in the right proportion," criticised another. "Don't you think so, Jothy?"

"I wish I were at home to eat my mother's curry!" lamented Sundari.

Jothy looked from one to the other and understood at once. One must uphold the honor of one's family.

"Chee! I can't finish it!" she said, making a face and pushing it away from her, though all her inner being cried out for it. Fortunately Matron Amma would not let them get up until every bit was eaten.

When plates and hands were washed and the former put away on a rack, they set out to explore the compound. An old girl called Leela, who was tall enough to wear a short saree of rather sleazy green silk over her jacket and petticoat, led the new girls from one place to another. They saw the great well and the reservoir beside it from which children were dipping up water in small pots.

"Come on, Leela!" called one, lifting a pot to her hip. "You have to help bring water to the kitchen."

"Tell Matron I'm looking after the new girls!"

Leela replied with a loud laugh. "These jungle children may fall into the well if I do not help them. See !" she went on, "the waterman draws the water up into the reservoir with his two bullocks every morning and evening. And here is the bathing-shed. You'll be well scrubbed, you jungle children ! Not you, Sundari," she added. "You're a teacher's child, aren't you ? *You* are as clean as any town girl."

Jothy felt a growing dislike for Leela as they walked about under the great, arching trees which flaunted their scarlet or blue blossoms high up above the reach of goats or children. She wondered why Sundari seemed to like Leela and walked with her arm around her. In time they left Jothy and the other new girls and wandered off together to the garden in front of the Missie's bungalow where scarlet hibiscus and fragrant jasmines grew within tempting reach of the bamboo fence. The other children were streaming across the compound to the school-building with slates and books, and then scattering to romp and play all over the wide green spaces.

Jothy and Rajee, another new village girl like herself, stood watching them rather wistfully for a few moments as they marked out lines in the dust and began to hop and kick stones with their toes. Others

ran inside the Missie's bungalow and came out with a fascinating ball that bounced. They lined up briskly according to height, and then separated alternately into two lines. Presently they were throwing and hitting the ball and running madly around a circle with shrieks and yells. Jothy and Rajee looked at one another dubiously. Was this school ?

"They say lessons begin tomorrow morning," Rajee said, as they went up the steps to explore the dormitory. They wandered into the great empty room across the front, and looked at the colored pictures on the wall. Jothy came suddenly face to face with a large picture of a child who moved when she moved. The child wore a torn pink jacket which was black with coal-dust and streaked with yellow juice, a string of red beads and a key hanging outside. She clutched her own key and realized that this was herself she was looking at.

"Didn't you ever see a mirror before ?" jeered Rajee, looking over her shoulder. "I have a little round one in my box."

Jothy stared at herself in silent realization of how different she was from Sundari, from Leela, from all those children, except Rajee whose faded skirt was torn and whose head was tousled. She put her hand to her

head. The other's hair was oiled, but hers was tangled, and bleached to a rusty brown by the sun. She turned away with distaste from the mirror.

"Let's go to the bazaar !" she suggested, feeling in a corner of her jacket for the knot that held the precious bit of silver — Nynah's parting gift.

"No, you don't !" exclaimed a big child called Kanthy who came in just then. "You can't go out of the gate."

"But I want to see Jeeva Sister ! Where is she ?" whimpered Jothy.

Kanthy laughed. "Not in the bazaar anyway ! The big girls live on the next compound near the mango orchard. You can go over to see them Sunday afternoon. Jeeva Sister is in the training-students' house. She will come over here every week to practice teaching, so don't cry !"

KANTHY bore them away to the bathing-shed, just as Leela had predicted. A horrible hour followed. Matron Amma was there, but she permitted Kanthy and another tall child to tear from Jothy her precious silk jacket and her skirt, the beads and the key. Before she knew what was happening her treasured black locks were falling about her under the "snip-snip" of something sharp in Matron's hand. Her pigtail was

gone ! Never in all her life had she been scrubbed with cocoanut-fibre and something frothy as she was now, with pot after pot of water from the reservoir poured relentlessly over her head, and her shivering body.

"Look at the child !" she heard the Matron say as she dried her briskly. "She's pretty ! She's lighter in color than any of you. It was just the dirt that made her so black. Don't cry, Little One ! Your hair will soon grow. Come to me every morning for cocoanut-oil until it comes in thick and black. Have you a clean skirt ? No ? Well, put on this one now, and run over to get your other jacket. I'll send the pink one to the dhoby. Now, Rajee !"

"Oh, look at Jothy !" the children exclaimed, staring at her when she appeared outdoors.

"Bald-head Jothy !" mocked Leela in her grating voice. "She's been on a pilgrimage to Tirupati and shaved off her hair !"

The children screamed with laughter at this joke, Sundari laughing harder than anyone else. "Come on, Leela Sister !" said Sundari, turning away as Jothy approached her. She walked off with her arm around that big girl, looking back over her shoulder and laugh-

ing at Jothy. From that time on she would have nothing to do with Jothy, but spent all her time with Leela. When Jothy faced her at meal-time, she looked away and talked to others. She joined in the laughter when one of the teachers scolded Jothy for being rude in handing her a lighted lantern with her left hand. When the Matron entrusted her with the lantern to carry to the teacher's room she had been far too much excited to remember what, of course, she knew — that a left-handed gift is an insult.

How she hated these snickering children, she reflected bitterly when they sat in rows on the cement floor of the courtyard before going to bed. They were quiet now, at last, and began to sing. Jothy realized that the tune was familiar. They sang it at evening school in Karumboor. As they started the second verse, the whole scene flashed back to her — herself and Dahveedu watching the lights blossom on one hill after another, at the Festival of Lights.

*"Jothy natchathira yerunthana vanay — while the stars show their light overhead, guard us safely, Father,"* sang the children. Those were the very words Dahveedu had said, from which Blackie had become Jothy, Y. Jothy of Karumboor, Senji Parish !

She whispered her title to herself as they spread their mats in rows on the cement floor and lay down to look up at the stars.

Now she was Y. Jothy of the Dawn-of-Wisdom school.



## CHAPTER X

### *JOTHY MEETS AN OLD FRIEND AND DECIDES TO STAY*

**A**LL RAISE your rice-hands !” commanded Vimala Teacher, standing beside the Song-singing Box. Her bracelets clinked as she raised her slender arm. Vimala Teacher was young and gay. Jothy’s eyes followed her in mute admiration, taking in every detail of her blue saree and red ear-rings and the long coil of sleek black hair which kept tumbling back into a girlish pigtail when she skipped or ran. It could not



be possible that she was a teacher. Teachers were tall, serious men who wore spectacles and brandished a stick to maintain order. One did not run and skip in school. One stood with folded arms, quite still in one's place.

"Your rice-hand, Little One!" repeated Teacher, looking at Jothy. Jothy folded her arms more tightly, not understanding. The circle of children tittered, waving their arms in air. "What a jungle child it is!" murmured Teacher, coming across the room and pulling Jothy's arm up. "Which hand do you eat with? Show me your rice-hand!"

Jothy held it out obediently, not understanding why but anxious to please. "Now your dirty-hand!" Teacher went on, and she thrust forward the left. The box began to sing again. "Rice-hand! Dirty-hand! Rice-hand! Dirty-hand!" chanted Teacher in time to the rhythm. Jothy obediently thrust forth the hands called for, but the children in line behind her pushed her forward with squeals of amusement. It seemed that when one said "hand" one meant foot. They were raising their knees and bringing their bare feet down with a slap against the stone floor as they walked around the circle. "Rice-hand foot! Dirty-

hand foot ! Right ! Left ! Right ! Left !” amended Teacher, keeping her eye on Jothy who found this all very tiresome and stupid.

If one must go around the room, why not walk without all this fuss ? Jothy knew as well as anyone that the rice-hand was for eating and all dirty work must be done with the dirty-hand, but what was the sense of all this ? But she liked the song which the box was singing. She wanted to stop and listen to it and to look at the pictures on the white-washed walls of this assembly-hall—a bigger, higher room than any she had yet seen. She wanted to look beyond the door where Sundari had gone.

Sundari had wept and pouted because they sent her to Class Three instead of Class Four, but she had consoled herself because Leela was in Class Three, a big girl among little ones. Leela was as tall as this teacher. Jothy’s thoughts were interrupted by the quickening of the rhythm as the song changed. She was caught in a moving line of children, but she slipped off to one side and leaned against the wall watching them, as they hopped like frogs, flew like birds, jumped like bunnies.

Near her on the side-lines stood another new girl—

a little Brahmin who had arrived under the escort of a man-servant who carried her slate. She, too, was rubbing her black velvet jacket against the whitewash of the wall, unwilling to joint the rest. Below the silver anklets on her feet she wore heavy leather shoes which squeaked as she walked so she stood still.

Except for Jothy and Rajee, the members of Class Two, who twirled now like falling leaves, were all something known as "day-'cholars" and did not live at the dormitory as Jothy did. Most of them looked like Oor children, though there were the waterman's little Lily, whose black body showed through rents in her clothes, and several others in faded cotton.

"Come on, little ones !" said Vimala Teacher, leaving the other children to "sleep like caterpillars in cocoons" in brightly colored heaps on the stone-paved floor. "We'll be the flowers for the butterflies to sip honey from." She tried to make Jothy and the Brahmin child hold out their hands in a flower-shape, but they shook their heads.

"Teacher," said the little patrician, glancing over her shoulder at Jothy and then gazing up into Vimala Teacher's face with disdain in her lovely brown eyes, "do you touch this girl ?"

Vimala Teacher put one arm around Jothy and reached out the other to the questioner. "What a question, Savitri !" she exclaimed. "Of course I do ! I touch all the children !"

Savitri drew away from her, gathering her maroon silk skirts close about her. "Then I won't touch *you* !" she said with a pout. Jothy gazed at her in wistful admiration. Her skin was just the shade of her gold bracelets and tiny ear-drops—a sort of creamy gold, set off by her tiny black caste-mark and velvet jacket, and the yellow chrysanthemums in her long, sleek braid. It was not till the breathless butterflies took their places at the Class Two end of the hall, and picked up their slates for "mental sums" that Savitri left her corner, unnoticed by any but Jothy, and squeaked painfully across to join them.

"One ! Two ! Three !" This teacher gave the signals just as the teacher did in Karumboor. The sums were easy, but Jothy's mind was distracted by the strange sights about her. Children ran through the other end of the hall on various errands. The Missie came in with bundles of books. A motor-car drove into the compound and out again, past the open windows. Once, twice, three times Teacher drew a "goose-

egg" on Jothy's slate. "Are you fit for Class Two?" she inquired dubiously. Jothy could do nothing more after that.

The words in the brand-new *Second Reader* swam before her eyes. When they sat down to write words to dictation she could not write. In Karumboor they always wrote standing up with their slates in the crooks of their left arms. Here she had to sit cross-legged on a plank with her slate on a sloping table over her knees, and write straight up and down ahead of her. Teacher shook her head once more and took the slate to the Missie who was still sorting books at the other end of the hall.

"But there *is* no Class One in this school!" Jothy heard the Missie say irritably. "If she can't keep up, we'll have to send her home."

Send her home! The words rang in Jothy's head throughout that endless morning. When the twelve o'clock bell released the noisy hordes again, she stood on the veranda gazing out across the wide green compound, seeing rice fields and hills and the roofs of Karumboor instead of the white-pillared dormitory and the red-tiled roof of the Missie's bungalow half hidden by the umbrella-tops of the flamboyer trees. This was not her place. The children pushed and jostled her.

She had lost her precious slate-pencil and cracked her new slate.

A small bell called the boarders of Classes Two and Three to the bathing-shed for more water-pouring. There was no escaping it. She had rubbed her teeth with charcoal, by means of a forefinger and a margosa twig, at dawn, as well as washed her face and hands and feet. Now she had to take off her clothes and stand in the row of small brown bodies along the edge of the shed while Leela and Kanthy brought in pots of water and went down the line sousing them. Matron Amma put something white and soft into her hand. Was it to eat ? She sniffed it tentatively then nibbled a bit and spat it out.

"Oh, look !" laughed Leela raucously. "The child is eating her soap !"

"You made mistakes when you were new !" reproved Matron. "Rub hard, all of you ! Rub each other's backs !"

"What jungle does this child come from ?" inquired Leela when the Matron had left. "Is it where you live, Sundari ?"

Sundari, who was at the other end of the wriggling, splashing, rubbing line, reached for her new towel which hung over the wall and began to dry herself.

"My father teaches the school there," she admitted loftily. "They are all coolies. It's just a jungle place — no civilization at all."

Jothy stared at Sundari in dumb, uncomprehending amazement, as she waited for the hot sun in the unroofed shed to dry her, for she had no towel. Was this her playmate of last year with whom she had staged dolls' weddings and chased butterflies and gone swimming in the lake? At home no one thought very much of Sundari except as "the teacher's girl," but Jothy belonged. They were proud of her and thought her smart. Here Jothy was nothing. She put on the same old skirt and jacket again for she had no other. Leela had appeared in a whole new outfit this morning, and Sundari was buttoning herself into another brand-new jacket of pink-flowered percale. Their boxes were full of clothes. The bell was ringing and Jothy was swept along by the tide to the kitchen veranda. Rajee sat next to her, salting her plate of rice and mutton-curry with liberal tears.

"I want to go home!" sobbed Rajee, even as she ate. "I hate Leela. I hate school! Leela said, 'Can a crow become a swan?' I heard her."

Comparing Rajee's cropped head and ragged skirt with the clean clothes and black pigtailed of the majority

of children, Jothy suddenly saw herself as others saw her. The new blue skirt and jacket were made of coarse homespun, not print nor gingham such as the children wore. It was very evident that hers were made out of a sarree, not out of cloth bought in lengths for the purpose. "Coolies! No civilization"—whatever that meant. She did not belong here. She felt among these cleanly clad children as if she had strayed into the Oor by mistake. She never should have come at all. They would send her home and that would disgrace the whole family. She must go before they sent her.

In this strange place, they had to get out their mats and sleep on the inner verandas at noon. A plan formed itself in Jothy's brain as she lay there with her eyes shut, but it was three o'clock before she escaped. When Class Two went out to start their garden, she escaped by a side gate and made her way around to the road that led to town. A crowd of coolie women, coming along with baskets of mangoes on their heads, stopped to answer her questions about the railway-station.

"We are going past it," they said. "Follow us."

Jothy trudged along through the white dust behind them, looking at the hills which were close around



them here in Jeyanoor, and covered with trees. She could not see any rice fields, but they passed a mango grove where large oval mangoes hung like yellow and red packages on their long stalks, in masses of glossy foliage. The women asked her questions, and stopped in the road uncertainly when she admitted that she planned to board the train.

"I have plenty of money," lied Jothy, seized by a spirit of adventure. "And my uncle is waiting for me at the station." She was so much convinced by her own story that she looked about for a familiar face in the crowd at the station, but no one noticed her, not even the man at the gate. After a long wait the bell rang and an engine puffed and clanked up the line, followed by a long train of freight and passenger cars. Jothy was the first to slip into an empty compartment. She rolled hastily under a lengthwise seat, as she had seen a beggar-boy do on the way to Jeyanoor — was it only the day before? Someone pushed a tin box under the seat and looked down to see what was obstructing it.

Jothy rolled over again and squeezed herself against the wall. She remembered that she had left her own box and mat behind her. What would Nynah say? She started to roll out, but more people got in and more bundles were shoved against her. In a sudden panic

she wondered where she should get off this train. They had come on three different trains. She had no Jeeva to steer her now. The trample of feet and shouting of many voices out on the platform seemed to indicate that the train was about to start. She braced herself for the jerk, choking with the dust and heat of her dark prison. She longed to get out, but it was too late now.

Suddenly she heard a familiar voice. Could it be ? Yes, it was the Missie's voice. "No, no child here," people were saying, but a box was pulled out and the Missie's red and dripping face looked in at the opening. Sobbing with both relief and fear, Jothy was hauled out by an arm and a leg and jumped from the high step to the ground.

"May I start the train, Madam ?" a dignified man was asking the Missie who replied breathlessly, "Yes, thank you so much, Station-master ! I have found her. This one did not try the engine !"

The crowd laughed and Jothy buried her face in the crook of her arm, much ashamed. Doubtless the Missie would be very angry with her and beat her for making such trouble in public. But the Missie only brushed the cobwebs and gray rolls of dust off her and let her wash her face at the pump, then walked up the road

beside her, rolling her two-wheeled carriage which they called a "cycle." She stopped to show Jothy the Police house where lines of red-turbaned constables were marching as Class Two had marched this morning. It *was* beautiful when they all lifted their knees together. They passed a big, big building, "Where boys go to school," the Missie said.

"Does our Dahveedu of Karumboor live here?" Jothy inquired timidly, but the Missie said, "No, it was a town day-school." Jothy plucked up courage to ask several perplexing questions. "Where is the white man who comes to Karumboor, and where are the two little ones? And where is the hospital with the high bed where my brother was?"

"The white man you mean must be Mr. Hoffman. He has two little ones. Their house is twenty miles from here in Periyoor where Dahveedu's school is. The hospital is here in Jeyanoor, beyond the station. I was just coming from there when I met the mango women who told me about you! Jothy, did you know you were on a train going north instead of south? How lost you would have been!"

Jothy buried her face in her arm for shame at this news.

"If you want to go home," the Missie continued, "let

me know so that someone can take you. School isn't a jail. You need not stay if you don't want to. What would your Nynah say to me if you were lost?"

Jothy was ready to howl with remorse, but the Missie lifted her up to ride on the seat of the bicycle, and let her ring the bell to make people get out of the way. Everyone greeted them with a smile as they passed. Jothy tried, when she was walking again, to tell the Missie how homesick she had been, how stupid and unfit she was for this school, but she could not get the words out. A white man in a motor-car who, the Missie said, was the Judge, stopped and spoke to the Missie in their strange language, but she shook her head and laughed as she answered him. They walked on past white bungalows set back in the midst of beautiful compounds, until they reached the gate of the school. Jothy felt ashamed to face the children, but they ran toward her shouting so joyously that she forgot her embarrassment.

"You ran away !" they exclaimed, regarding her with awe and admiration. "Matron sent the Waterman to see if you had fallen in the well, and Teacher is crying and searching all over the compound."

"Did you ride in the engine ?" Krupa of Class Five inquired as they escorted her in a body to Matron's

room. "Two years ago a girl rode away in the engine, but she never came back to school."

"Child ! Child !" lamented the Matron, shedding real tears of relief. "Were you so unhappy here? You children must stop teasing her. You are so unkind to each other."

Sundari and Leela, who were looking over the heads of the crowd, ran away laughing. Matron Amma sent the rest away too.

"You went off before I had time to give you your clothes," the Matron said reproachfully, handing Jothy a pile of folded gingham. She gazed at the garments and looked up questioningly.

"Don't thank me. Thank the Missie," Matron explained reassuringly. "She wants you all to change clothes every Wednesday and Saturday. Keep one set — that nice blue one — for church and for special occasions. Here's a towel for you too, and a cake of soap. See ! Your Jeeva Sister has sewed your number, 86, on each of the garments, so you won't lose them. Now take them and lock them up in your box carefully, and bring me the dirty ones you're wearing to send to the dhoby."

Jothy went off to the little dressing-room which the

other boarders of Classes Two and Three had already named "Lotus Palace." She spread her mat on the crumbling cement floor and laid the clothes upon it.

"I have a new set from the Missie too," said Rajee, who had followed her. "My number is 87. See!"

They tried on their new jackets and petticoats—four of them—one after the other and ran out to look at themselves in the mirror. Jothy had a red-checked skirt with a red jacket to match, a blue skirt and jacket with a fine white line in it, and two plaid skirts with white "jumper" jackets that slipped on over the head. It was when she had on the blue "church" outfit that she noticed the grimy streaks on her face and ran off to the bathing-shed with her soap and towel to find water to wash in. How cool and nice she felt! She could not bear to take off that sky-blue suit, so she strolled out to the playground, feeling blissfully inconspicuous in the crowd. The children were playing hard. Some still hopped after stones and chased balls. Others squatted on the ground playing jack-stones, or dayam, which is a sort of parchesi, with nicked stones for dice and pebbles to move about the squares which they chalked on the veranda. Jothy looked on for a while and then strolled over to the Missie's bungalow

remembering the Matron's admonition. A motor-car stood in front of the steps. As she tiptoed up and peered around the side of a potted palm, she saw that there were visitors sitting in cane chairs on the veranda.

"Jothy!" exclaimed a surprised voice. "Karumboor Jothy, isn't it?"

It was Lakshmi! She looked like a grown-up woman in her green Benares silk saree with gold belt and gold border, but the face was the face of her old playmate, the master's daughter. The two stared at each other for a moment with rapture and homesick longing in their eyes. "Jothy from home!" cried Lakshmi, suddenly beginning to cry. "How is my mother? When did you leave?"

The Missie came forward and put a hand on the shoulder of each of the girls. "That's very nice, Lakshmi. You have a friend here already, and I suppose you know Sundari too. Jothy, you might take Lakshmi and show her the school." She looked back questioningly at the portly lady in a purple saree with massive gold bracelets, who sat in a big wicker chair, and at the gentleman in black coat and gold-bordered turban who stood beside her. They nodded their approval, and the girls set off down the steps, arms linked, tongues chattering all the gossip of Karumboor. They

stood for a long time under the pergola in the Missie's garden, hidden from intruders by sprays of pink antigonon creepers.

"Is that your husband ? And your mother-in-law ?" Jothy inquired eagerly. "I thought you were in Madras."

"I was." Lakshmi's tears were nearly dry now.



"Oh, no, my husband is not so old! This is his older brother, in whose home I live. *He* has gone over the sea. I told you that, silly !"

"But do you live here ?"

"Yes, on the Reddy street near the bazaar and the



big Mission Hospital. We came last month. My brother-in-law was transferred here. He works for the Government. We waited for an auspicious day for me to begin school."

"School?" Jothy gasped incredulously. "You're coming to school? But I thought you were married!"

"*He* will hold a high position, so I must be educated, especially in English. That's why I am to come here and learn English from Miss Lang."

"How do you like being married?"

Lakshmi bent her head and twisted an end of her saree in pleased embarrassment. "I have a private teacher to help me make up my lessons," she went on, evading the question. "I went to school in Madras too."

"Show me your tali!" demanded Jothy, not to be put off like this.

Lakshmi unfastened the neck of her white silk blouse and drew out the yellow cord with gold pendants on it. She thrust it back hastily and turned toward the school.

"Come! Show me the classrooms!" she begged, pulling Jothy along with her old childish glee. "How beautiful you look, Jothy! I hardly knew you! A good thing you are so clean, or they might not let me play with you. You know," she confided, as they

walked across to the school, among the playing children, "my brother-in-law doesn't care for caste at all, but some people in this town tried to stop him from sending me here, saying this was a low caste school."

"We have Brahmin girls and girls of other castes, as well as Christians," defended Jothy. "Some even live here in a house on the big girls' compound, and others come from the town."

"My mother-in-law says that she doesn't care so long as the children keep clean and have no diseases."

"Oh, the Missie makes us wash all the time," Jothy assured her, much pleased at the sensation she caused, leading this elegant young lady familiarly up the school steps. They were surrounded by many eager guides.

"This is the big room where we have Assembly in the morning," Jothy announced proudly. "And that is the song-singing box —"

"No !" corrected little Padma from the rear. "G'am-p'one box ! And that tall black box in the corner is the organ-box —"

"No, silly !" amended Kanthy. "Not organ. Piano."

"The Missie hits it so — so — gaily with her two hands," chattered Jothy, all her self-consciousness swallowed up in happiness. "And we all sing."

"Look !" Kanthy took the books off the piano and

opened the top. They climbed on a bench to look in. "See the funny little hammers ! Once a mouse got inside and chewed everything so that it would not play. And when it rains, everything sticks !"

"What class will you be in ?" they asked Lakshmi, when they were trying the real desks that stood in rows in the Fifth Class room, and gazing at the funny lines on the wall which Kanthy called maps.

"He said that I should study in High School," said Lakshmi, opening and shutting the cover of a desk. "In the High School all lessons are in English."

"I'm going to High School next year," said Kanthy eagerly. "Will you be in First Form ?"

"The Missie says I must come here first, but my mother-in-law says I must go to High School even if I just sit in the class. That's what they are talking about now."

"Come here, Lakshmi !" they urged. "We have good times here."

They encountered Leela and Sundari in the dormitory.

"Lakshmi !" cried Sundari joyfully. "Where did you come from ?"

"She's Jothy's friend," small Padma informed her.

"Jothy's friend ? She's *my* friend !" asserted Sundari hotly. "You're *my* friend, aren't you, Lakshmi ?"

"Come with us, Sundari," begged Jothy. "We'll show her the well. It's different from the one at home."

Sundari started to go along with them, chattering gaily of Karumboor. It seemed like old times for the three of them to be giggling together about the washerman's cross-eyed son and the blacksmith's daughter's wedding, and which families had had new babies since Lakshmi left. It was not to last long, however, for Leela seized Sundari from behind and drew her away.

"Oh, very well !" she remarked, as Sundari hesitated. "I thought you said you wanted *me* for your friend. If you don't—"

"I do !" agreed Sundari hastily. "Go and come back, Lakshmi ! I'll see you in school. We're going to—to do something."

Jothy was too happy to care whether Sundari came or went. They stood under the cork trees where white blossoms fluttered down to make a carpet of fragrance. The heat was gone out of the sunlight, which now lay softly across the playground where the children whirled and shouted and played. The milkman led his big

humped cows to the dormitory steps to be milked under the watchful eye of the Matron. A flock of crows quarrelled among the scarlet blossoms of the flamboyer trees. Presently the Missie came out to find them, and Lakshmi was whirled away in the car.

"Well, Jothy," said the Missie, as they stood on the steps among the potted ferns and crotons, watching the cloud of dust that followed the car, "do you want me to send you home? Lakshmi is coming to school here tomorrow, but if you want to go —"

The tinkle of the Matron's bell cut faintly through the uproar. The eighty-seven turned from their play with whoops and calls. "Food! Food!" they shouted, racing one another to the steps.

Jothy drew in a long breath of sweet-scented air and let it out in a sigh. "No," she said slowly. "I'll stay." She caught the Missie's hand and looked up into her face with a sudden smile, but the words would not come. Then she turned and ran into the stream of children that tore up the dormitory-steps and pounded across the courtyard to the kitchen. "I'm first! I'm first!"



## CHAPTER XI

### *JOTHY LOSES A SILVER BELT*

SCHOOL was a happy place when one had a friend. Every morning Jothy hurried through her sweeping, humming a joyful tune as she bent over to sweep away the dust and leaves which blew in to make her a task in the courtyard. She was the first to finish her plate of millet porridge — such queer porridge, finely ground and sweetened with milk and brown sugar — the first to wash her hands and plate and slip away

out of the crowd to wait for Lakshmi under the banyan tree by the gate. Of course Lakshmi could not arrive until nearly eight o'clock, for her private teacher kept her busy before that, but Jothy had learned that it was best to keep out of sight of the dormitory. Rajee and Padma and Mary were always being caught by Matron Amma or one of the teachers and sent off on tiresome errands.

"Jo-thy ! O-o-o-oh, Jo-thee-ee-ee !" the Matron's voice called shrilly from the veranda this August morning, when the heavy dew still matted the scorched grass with silvery spider-webs. Jothy crept stealthily to the other side of the thick central trunk of the banyan. An angle of the school-building hid her from the Matron, but Classes Three, Four and Five, who were imprisoned in study-hour, might give her away. They looked wistfully out through the open doors of their classrooms.

"Someone tell Jothy to come back here and gather up her sweepings," scolded Matron's voice again, but Jothy went on weaving a garland of cork blossoms for Lakshmi. Cross old Matron ! She was always interfering with one's plans. She wouldn't let anyone get up until nearly daylight. Jothy tossed on her mat from the time the first cock crowed. There was all the fuss

about combing one's hair and spreading one's mat in the sun and then rolling it up, and washing one's hands everlastingly. One could not drop so much as a peanut-shell on the floor without a rumpus.

And then there was the task of learning to speak with due respect ! At home Jothy had used the same pronouns to everybody, except sometimes at school when the teacher made them speak politely. The polite forms sounded too affected for everyday use, unless Nynah was trying to coax a favor from the master. Here, however, it was a dreadful crime to use the familiar "thou" to Matron Amma or a teacher or to Jeeva Sister and other big girls. Even Leela demanded the polite "you," on the score of being thirteen years old, but Jothy spoke to Leela as little as possible anyway. She had an "eternal hatred" against Leela. After many reproofs and corrections she learned to put the polite endings to every verb and pronoun, and to drop certain bits of village slang which brought shouts of laughter. Lakshmi's speech was so beautiful that Jothy loved to listen to it. "I'm just a crow trying to be a swan !" she confided to Lakshmi sometimes when she had made a bad mistake.

Jothy laid her frail garland on the grass and took up her slate. Under the hanging roots of the banyan



tree no one cared how she held her slate. She wrote slant-wise, in her old fashion, finishing the Tamil sentences which Teacher demanded. It was a stanza from Avvai, the poetess of ancient times, which she copied from the book:

*When drought dries up the pool,  
The water-birds leave it and fly away.  
The water-plants remain to suffer with it.  
Thus are true friends.*

"Jothy's waiting for her 'prend' !" remarked a little voice at her elbow. It was Savitri, arm in arm with the waterman's Lily. Savitri now left her uncomfortable shoes inside and romped happily about the playground with the other "day-'cholars" as they arrived.

"F-f-f-friend !" hissed Jothy irritably after her, setting her upper teeth firmly in her lower lip as the Missie had taught them in English class. She felt humiliated to be in the same class with these babies of five and six. She was determined to get into Class Three with Sundari and Lakshmi.

"Jothy !" broke in another voice at her elbow. "Give me a piece of your slate-pencil !"

Jothy looked at her beautiful long slate-pencil in its

pink paper wrapping and shook her head, letting it squeak as she wrote steadily on.

"I'll tell Teacher you stole that pencil out of Lakshmi's desk !" threatened Rajee angrily. "You had none of your own and no money to buy one, and you opened Lakshmi's desk and stole it !"

"I did not !" Jothy sprang to her feet and clutched her pencil. "Lakshmi gave me a key to her desk. I can take anything I like—even her ear-rings or her ink-pills, or—or—anything !"

"You'd better be careful !" Rajee warned her, much piqued at being refused. "You know they're trying to find out who stole Kanthy's short saree, and Teacher's fountain-pen and Krupa's pocket-money. If you go opening desks, they'll suspect you."

"Here, then !" Jothy broke off a piece for her impatiently and ran to meet the motor-car which dropped Lakshmi at the gate. They repaired to their favorite corner under the aloe hedge to study their English spelling lesson together, and Jothy poured out her tale to Lakshmi.

"Of course you can have my slate-pencil," confirmed Lakshmi. "My mother-in-law will get me as many as I want in the bazaar. Oh, Jothy ! You would be so pretty if you only had some ear-rings ! I don't dare

to take mine off, but here !” She unclasped the flexible belt of silver links, which held in her mauve saree, and fastened it over Jothy’s plaid gingham where it sagged almost to her hips. They found a bit of charcoal with which Lakshmi made a round dot on Jothy’s forehead and then visited the mirror to view the effect. They had to separate when the bell rang.

Jothy ran to her place in the line that waited to march in to Assembly, clutching a package of fried cakes wrapped in a piece of plantain leaf, which Lakshmi had handed her. She distributed these down the line while they waited, omitting Leela, who also had a hand outstretched.

“Ditch-digger’s daughter !” retorted Leela vengefully. “Do you think that mark on your forehead makes you high caste ?”

A black mark for whispering in line did not improve Leela’s temper, nor did the Missie’s scolding in “Beginners’ English” when she appeared with no slate-pencil to write her spelling. Jothy offered her none, though she stood next to her and squeaked her own pencil triumphantly.

“Run !” commanded the Missie, when spelling was written. She wore the yellow dress today, which

matched her straw-colored hair. She always scolded when she wore that dress.

"I am run-NING !" chanted the class, suiting the action to each word of her commands. "I am jumping ! I am sit-TING DOWN ! I am stan-DING UP !"

English was dreadfully difficult to learn. One could not string sound-symbols together as in Tamil. "A" had one sound in "hall" and another in "hat" and still another in "take." It was all a muddle. No wonder the Missie lost her patience.

"Anyone who comes to class without a pencil hereafter," said the Missie when the bell rang, "will be punished ! Do you hear that, Leela ?"

"You wait and see !" muttered Leela when the Missie left. "A big black devil will catch Jothy !"

"Oh !" murmured the children delightedly. "Leela and Jothy have an 'eternal hatred' !"

Jothy shuddered. Leela might be a horrid girl, but she knew all there was to know about devils. That night after the Matron and the teachers had shut the doors of their rooms, some of the children rolled stealthily over in the dark to Leela's mat to hear more of her stories.

An irresistible fascination drew Jothy into the group that huddled, horror-stricken, about Leela.

"—and they neglected to kill a cock on the doorstep of the new house," Leela's voice murmured dramatically on. "So someone put the Evil Eye on them, and the yayval haunted the house."

"Yayval?" inquired Sundari innocently. "What's that?"

The children laughed their scorn so unguardedly that they had to roll back in haste and lie very still as Matron's door opened. When the danger was past, they were back again.

"The yayval is the stone-dropping demon!" Jothy whispered to Sundari. She knew that Sundari's father never let anyone talk about devils.

"—and stones fell from the ceiling constantly and hit them," Leela went on. "Not only stones but all kinds of filth too. It fell into their food before they could touch a hand to it, *but no one was there!* No one would live in that house, so they tore it down."

"Another story!" begged the children when Leela stopped.

"There's a devil right here in our school," began Leela, lowering her voice to that mysterious tone which paralyzed her listeners with foreboding. "I saw it

this morning. It lives in the margosa tree back of the kitchen."

Jothy buried her face in her arm, remembering Leela's prophecy of the morning.

"—and I followed the figure in the dark, thinking it was Kanthy calling me to work in the kitchen," Leela continued. "When we got to the kitchen—she bent over the pot on the fire to stir it—and I saw—I saw—"

"What?" gasped the children. "Oo-oo-oo-oooh! What did you see?"

Leela's voice sank to a whisper. "Her legs were all hairy like a goat's—"

"O-oo-oooh!" shuddered the children, pulses pounding in the darkness.

"—and it disappeared up the chimney!"

Something woolly brushed against Jothy's face. It must be that devil. All the power in her body went into a shrill scream which was taken up by eighty-six others, most of whom woke out of a sound sleep and did not know what it was all about. All the grown-ups were there waving their arms before the children kept quiet. Even the knock-kneed old waterman ran in with a stick, eyes rolling with fright. The Missie appeared, looking like a little girl with her hair in a

long yellow pigtail, and wearing a long light robe with no belt. Her voice changed from alarm to anger as the screams quieted down and sheepish grins went round the huddled circle of children.

"Who started it ?" she demanded indignantly.

"I'm still trembling with the fright !" the Fourth



Class teacher complained, tightening her loosened white saree about her. "Don't you remember the story we read about 'Wolf ! Wolf !'"

"Teacher," said Leela righteously to Vimala Teacher, who stood with her hand over her mouth trying not to laugh, "I was asleep and Jothy was beside me. She suddenly clutched me and that frightened me so I screamed too."

"Here is one girl who speaks up and acknowledges her fault !" praised the Missie. "Jothy, why did you wait for someone else to tell on you ?"

"A devil — touched me —" gasped Jothy, still cold with horror at the memory. She flung herself into her teacher's arms, and sobbed afresh.

"Devil ?" said the Missie impatiently. "Nonsense ! How many times must I tell you all that the only devil you need to fear is the one in your own heart — not in the margosa tree ! Aiyō !" she sighed with relief, sinking down on the edge of the veranda and leaning against a pillar. "What a fright I had ! I imagined robbers and earthquakes and wild animals destroying my children." The children laughed as she smiled, but immediately she was serious again. "I won't have any more of these panics !" she commanded, wagging a finger at them. "We're going to learn self-control this year. The first one who screams will have to be punished, for she starts it. Jothy will have to eat her noon rice tomorrow with no curry-sauce. Don't you agree, Matron Amma ?"

"She is new — and so little !" pled that motherly soul, still wiping tears of panic from her eyes, but the Missie was firm.

Although Matron left the wall-lamp turned up high



for the rest of the night, Jothy lay there trembling and cold, dropped off to dream of fresh horrors and woke to shudder again. Certainly that devil or someone's Evil Eye bewitched her next day, for everything went wrong. It was a New Moon day—that is, the dark of the moon, when evil influences are always abroad. Most of the Hindu day-scholars stayed at home for special baths and fasts and worship. It was not that Jothy minded eating her rice without curry for once, though the public disgrace was hard. It seemed as if all the spice went out of life when Lakshmi did not come to school. During recess her slate-pencil disappeared mysteriously from her desk, and she had to stand idle while her class drew a spider-web for Nature Study. English would come next.

Between periods Jothy fled frantically to the Third Class room to borrow another slate-pencil from Lakshmi's desk. She could not face the Missie in disgrace a second time. The room was empty when she went in, for the class was out studying birds. She could find no pencil in Lakshmi's desk. As she closed down the lid in despair, she spied a pink-wrapped new pencil just like her missing one protruding from a book on the next desk. As she took it with a sigh of relief, Leela hurried in to fetch her slate, and flatly

denied that it was Jothy's pencil. In the struggle for possession that ensued, they knocked over an ink-bottle and Jothy fled to Beginners' English with a large black spot on her white jacket.

*This is the way—I wash my yands,  
Wash my yands, Wash my yands,*

sang the beginners in chorus, rubbing their hands together gleefully at sight of Jothy's spot. The Missie's eyes were on that spot too, as they sang one song after another. In a few minutes it would be time to write the spelling-words and still she had no pencil. Her friends had half-inch stubs and the rest were glad of a chance to pay her back for not sharing with them. She sought frantically for a way to escape the punishment that was surely coming when dictation began. If she tried — if she let herself go, she could have a fit. She had seen people have fits in Karumboor, and the priest came to drive out the devil. The Missie could not scold her if she had a fit.

"First word — *way!*" dictated the Missie, as Jothy hesitated. Her eyes travelled around the big circle. As soon as she looked at Jothy —

But Jothy was spared the necessity of a subterfuge, for an interruption occurred just in the nick of time.

A man came in with a letter — the peon, or messenger, with the blue-and-yellow striped shoulder-band and brass badge who brought Lakshmi's food to her every noon in a three-decked brass "tiffin-carrier." He salaamed very respectfully and waited on the veranda while the Missie tore open the letter and read it. Jothy looked around for Sundari, to ask her for a piece of pencil. "Where's Sundari?" she whispered to a Third Class girl.

"Sundari has sore eyes so she's in the sick-room," another child whispered.

"Jothy!" said the Missie suddenly. "Have you Lakshmi's silver belt?"

"Yes," stammered Jothy, taken by surprise. "It's — it's in my box."

The Missie folded up the letter in her hand with a sigh of relief. "Go and get it, child. The man has come for it."

Leela waved her arm. "Amma," she said virtuously (for the children all called the Missie mother). "Didn't you tell us never to open other people's desks? Jothy is always opening desks and taking things. Please ask her not to."

"Take your slates!" said the Missie sharply, paying no attention. "Second word — 'wash.'" But she fol-

lowed Jothy to the veranda and spoke to her, "Why did you take the belt?"

"I didn't." Jothy cast an indignant glance back in the direction of Leela. "She just said —"

"Never mind that. Why did you take the belt?"

Jothy was alarmed by the intensity of feeling in the Missie's voice. She twisted a corner of her jacket and gazed at the floor. "She gave me her belt yesterday, and then didn't take it back again."

"I hope you're speaking the truth. Run along and get it."

Evidently the Missie did not believe her. She flew across to the dormitory in her haste to justify herself. Sundari was just coming out of the "Lotus Palace" as she ran across the courtyard, but she looked around with a startled glance as Jothy hailed her, and went out past the kitchen. Jothy unlocked and flung open her box, then rubbed her eyes in amazement. There was no belt there. She had left it on top of the pile of clothing this morning, and thought she had been careful to lock the box. She pulled everything out on the floor frantically, then ran out after Sundari. "Where's Sundari?" she asked of the servant who was tending the great caldron of rice on the kitchen fire.

The servant pointed out toward the rear. "Someone went out the back door."

Jothy ran across the walled rear court and pushed back the heavy door. Sundari answered her call from near the aloe hedge that marked the boundary of the compound. She stood holding a piece of saffron-dyed cloth to her swollen eyes, for saffron is supposed to have healing properties. "No," she said crossly. "How should I know where the belt is?"

Jothy was weeping with consternation when she returned to the English class. "It was there this morning, but someone has taken it!" she insisted. At the look of disbelief in the Missie's face she wept again.

"Now, Jothy," said the Missie pleadingly. "Don't make it worse by lying about it. What did you do with the belt?" At Jothy's repeated denials, she took up the letter again. "This is a letter from Lakshmi's brother-in-law. I'll read it to show you all how serious this matter is. It affects the good name of the Dawn-of-Wisdom School. I'll translate the English words just as he says them:

*Dear Miss Lang:*

*I am sorry to inform you that some girl at your school has taken from my sister-in-law a valuable silver*

*belt which has been in our family for generations. My mother is much disturbed. When I questioned her closely, Lakshmi said that the girls repeatedly open her desk and steal her things. We are punishing her for her carelessness by keeping her at home until the lost property is recovered.*

"Now, Jothy," proceeded the Missie, "you see what a bad idea they have gained of our school."

The children sat in a silent and wide-eyed circle. The peon coughed impatiently on the veranda. The Missie sent him away. "Tell Mr. Gopal Reddy that I shall send an answer later by the school-peon. Tell him we are attending to the matter."

They went on with the class, but Jothy felt that all eyes were fixed in reproach upon her. The lack of a pencil was a small matter in the face of this mystery. She eyed Leela, feeling sure that she had something to do with this. When the bell rang, she waved her arm. "May I go and look for the belt?" she asked.

"Yes, look for it and find it!" said the Missie firmly as she left.

Jothy ran back to the dormitory turning over various thoughts and plans in her mind. She made straight for Leela's box. Fortunately it was open, but there

was no belt there, though she tumbled the things about. Perhaps Sundari had kept it for her. She tried Sundari's box, but there was no belt there. She tried every other box in "Lotus Palace" which would open, and searched her own again, to no avail. Stopping to think, she remembered that Sundari had run out in a startled way when she came in the first time. Impetuously she ran out the back way again and stood beside the aloe hedge where she had found Sundari. She stooped to look into the hedge, but just then Sundari's voice hailed her from the window of the sick-room. "What are you doing there?"

"Come out here and find the belt!"

"What belt?" stammered Sundari. "The sunlight makes my eyes smart."

Jothy became crafty in her desperation. "You hid that belt," she ventured boldly. "Come out here and give it back to me."

Sundari appeared in a moment, weeping into her yellow cloth. "What belt, Jothy?"

"If you don't show me where you hid it, I'll go right down and call the Missie. Yes, I will."

"No, no, Jothy!" There was terror in Sundari's voice. "She'd tell my father and he'd never forgive me. He's so very strict—"

"Then where is it?" demanded Jothy. "Why did you take it out of my box?"

Sundari broke down completely, pressing both hands over her painful eyes. "Leela asked me to do it," she admitted. "I'll give it back. It's in our hiding-place in the hedge. But you won't tell anyone, will you?" she went on desperately. "If you go back now they'll ask —"

"If I take it back now, they'll have to know," said Jothy. "Or they'll blame me for not bringing it at first, and the Missie will think I took it."

"I'm afraid of Leela," sobbed Sundari. "She can do terrible things to us, Jothy. I dare not tell on her. Anyway, she is so clever, she would bring the blame on me. I'm sure she would, even though I'm her friend. And she — she — can call devils, too!"

They stood staring at one another in a predicament, while parrots chattered in a palm tree near by. In the distance they heard the gramophone playing in the assembly hall for the Class Two Rhythms period. Soon the twelve o'clock bell would ring and they would be surrounded by chattering hordes of children.

"Jothy, no one expects anything of you," sobbed Sundari. "You're just a coolie's child and they will say you don't know any better. But my father is a



teacher, and he told me that if I were not a good girl everyone would blame him, and would think him unfit for his position."

"You want me to say I took it?" Jothy's eyes and mouth opened wide at this suggestion. "What about the honor of *my* family? I'm not a thief, even if my father *is* a coolie. And then," she went on, "Lakshmi won't believe it if I say I took it. She knows that's a lie, and she'll explain when she returns." She quoted to Sundari the letter which had come. "I suppose she was afraid to tell her mother-in-law that she herself gave it to me," she speculated.

"Oh, Jothy!" Sundari was almost wailing now. "You know my father, how strict he is, especially about honesty! Don't—don't tell! I'll do anything—anything you say!"

Jothy's mind worked rapidly. The stanza which they had chanted again and again this morning sang itself in her head.

*The water-plants remain to suffer with it—  
Thus are true friends.*

"Don't cry, Sundari, or you'll make your eyes worse. We'll think of something clever, like Thennal Raman,"

she decided. "Can we get the belt back to Lakshmi without anyone knowing, so she can come to school?"

Sundari shook her head. "Leela's great-aunt, who lives in the town—don't, don't tell anyone that the woman who sells appams here on Saturdays is Leela's aunt—she's coming this noon to take the belt from the hiding-place and sell it for us. That's our secret—Leela's and mine. Don't let her know I told you. I don't know what she'll do."

"She's a bad girl!" stormed Jothy. "Why are you friends with her, Sundari? Why aren't you friends with me any more?"

"Oh, I'll be friends with you forever," promised Sundari, wiping her bloodshot eyes, "if you'll just save me now."

"We must hide it in some other place till afternoon, then we'll take it secretly to Lakshmi's house and throw it in the window," decided Jothy, "and then no one will know, and Lakshmi will come back."

"But where will you hide it?"

"Not out here, for someone will find it surely. Not in the dormitory—" Jothy hesitated. "Let's hide it somewhere in the school. You are in the sick-room. You hide it while we're standing in line for food."

"No, no ! I'll get caught ! You do it !"

"All right, then, silly." Jothy felt suddenly very superior, as she took the lead. She was almost exhilarated at the thought of putting through a clever stratagem that would make everything right again with no names disgraced. "You get the belt out while we're eating, and put it on underneath your skirt-band, and I'll finish first and come out during Rest Hour."

Everything worked into their hands. The Matron forbade Leela and the rest to go near Sundari for fear of catching the sore eyes. Jothy was able to choke down her food and slip out unnoticed in the confusion that followed when the school-dhoby arrived and spread piles and piles of clean clothing out on mats on the verandas, for the children to sort. The school-building was silent and empty when Jothy and Sundari crept into it by a back door. The day-scholars who had come to school that day had taken their lunch out to eat in the shade of the trees. The girls tiptoed into the assembly hall and looked about for a hiding-place.

"I know !" said Jothy suddenly as an idea struck her. "The piano !" Quick as a flash she dragged the stool around, climbed up and handed the music-books down to Sundari. When she lifted the lid, there were all

the little hammers ! She took the belt from Sundari, pulled out six or eight hammers and hung the belt securely over them. Then they scurried back into the rear door of the dormitory before anyone missed them.



## CHAPTER XII

### *JOTHY FOLLOWS THE EXAMPLE OF THE WATER-PLANTS*

TO GET the belt to Lakshmi's house, however, seemed impossible. The Missie took it into her head that very day to ordain that hereafter the school-building must be kept locked except in school-hours. "We have had six different thefts since the term began," she told the children at closing-time that afternoon, calling them all into the hall. "If we cannot trust

everybody, we must protect our property by locking the building."

The children stared at Jothy, for the news of the lost belt had circulated rapidly.

"I am sorry to say," the Missie went on, "that the latest loss is Lakshmi's silver belt which Jothy says was taken out of her box this morning. We shall have to call a meeting of our Council of Five. You know every village has a Council of Five, to inquire into cases like this, and we have one when we need it. I want Classes Four and Five to go back to their rooms and elect two members each — good, trustworthy girls, and Class Three to elect one. These five please come over to my room to meet with Matron Amma and me in half an hour's time. Jothy, you come and ask your teacher to come, too."

"It was in my box and now it is gone," was all that Jothy would say to the Council, though they labored with her for an hour or more. The Five sat cross-legged in a solemn semi-circle on the Missie's woolly rug — Kanthy and Krupa of Class Five, Prema and Mary of Class Four, Leela of Class Three. Behind them sat Matron Amma, Vimala Teacher and Miss Lang in chairs. All gazed reproachfully at Jothy who stood in front of them, twisting her skirt.

"Do you have any idea where it is?" Kanthy asked persuasively.

"It was there and now it isn't," Jothy repeated doggedly.

Witnesses were called. One of the school-cooks testified that she had seen Jothy go out of the back door before twelve and another child, too — possibly Sundari. She couldn't be sure. Sundari came in with her yellow cloth pressed to her eyes. Yes, she admitted, she had seen Jothy in the dormitory before twelve. No, she had been in the sick-room as Matron Amma told her. Yes, she had gone out of the back door to find herself a tamarind to eat, but she hadn't seen anything nor anybody — God in heaven knew she hadn't, she insisted fervently, quailing under Leela's intent gaze. When one of the day-scholars testified that she had seen Jothy and Sundari near the school-building at noon, both girls looked blank. "Ask Rajee if I did not pick out my clean clothes from the pile this noon," Jothy suggested, and Rajee testified that Jothy had.

"Is Jothy a girl who usually tells lies?" the Missie inquired, when the witnesses had left.

"She opens desks," Leela testified apparently with great reluctance. "I caught her opening Lakshmi's desk this morning —"

"Lakshmi is my friend !" Jothy retorted stubbornly. "She gave me her key and she said I could open it."

"But Mr. Gopal Reddy wrote that she complained about that," the Missie reminded her, "and she did not say that she gave the belt to you."

"She is my friend," was all that Jothy would say. Everything seemed to be closing in on her. If they could only smuggle that belt to Lakshmi's house, there would be no further trouble.

"I caught Jothy stealing my pencil," Leela added. "See where she spilled the ink when I took it from her ?"

Jothy shot one baleful glance at Leela, then tightened her lips into a stubborn line and hardened her heart against them all. They tried to talk kindly, but it was clear that they all thought her guilty. Only the presence of the grown-up members of the court prevented immediate sentence of punishment. The Council of Five adjourned until the next day. Another hour or two of questions made Jothy break down into tears, but she refused to say anything except what she had said the day before. She was afraid that if she opened her mouth, she would blurt out everything and get poor Sundari into dreadful trouble, so she kept her teeth clenched. After a long, long sermon from the



Missie they let her go, and the Council met no more. It was taken for granted that she had committed the theft and that she would confess it in the course of time. The Missie looked at her reproachfully whenever they met, the Matron called her into her room almost daily to urge her to confess, her beloved Teacher nearly broke down her defenses with her persuasions. Still the two girls, hard as they tried, were not able to dispose of that belt. When Leela discovered that Sundari had balked her plan, she set herself upon revenge.

"I'm sure Sundari and Jothy have hidden that belt somewhere," she whispered to a group of her followers. "If we watch where they go, we can find out."

"Not Sundari, surely," the Class Three teacher protested when this was repeated to her. "She's such a good girl. See how loyal she is to Jothy, just when the rest of you are avoiding her. She's trying to influence her to confess."

"By associating with evil ones, we become evil," quoted Leela, using a Poetical Precept to justify her break with Sundari.

"But if you can find the belt, Leela," the teacher added, "I hope you will, so that poor Lakshmi can come back to school."

With Leela and the rest continually at their heels,

with the assembly hall inaccessible except in school-hours, Jothy found her plan completely blocked. School-life went on very much as usual, except that now Jothy and Sundari were friends, spending much of their time outside of class walking, with their arms intertwined, around the edge of the compound.

One morning in Assembly the Missie reverted to the incident again, after a talk on courage. "Some little girl here knows where Lakshmi's belt is," she said by way of application, adding as they turned to stare at Jothy, "No, there is no proof that Jothy did it. She says she did not. Poor Lakshmi suffers because the little thief is such a coward. Won't she be like Daniel and face the lions of disgrace and punishment boldly? Come on! We'll sing 'Dare to be a Daniel!' to help her."

The Missie sat down on the piano stool for the first time in many days, and lifted the cover. Jothy and Sundari sat paralyzed, expecting that their hour of discovery had come. The Missie raised her hands and brought them down with a crash on the first chord, but there was a strange jangle of sound. She tried the notes and found that some did not sound. "I must have the piano tuned," she muttered, and closed it again. They sang without the piano, "Dare to be a

Daniel ! Dare to stand alone !” but no one made any move to face the lions that day.

“We can’t go on like this,” Jothy protested to Sundari that afternoon as they walked far behind the rest when the Matron took them for a walk in the forest. “Please tell them you did it for Leela, or else someone will write and tell my father that I am a thief. Please, Sundari.”

“I can’t, I can’t !” wailed Sundari, clutching Jothy’s arm. “You promised you wouldn’t tell, Jothy ! You promised to be my friend.”

“I *am* your friend,” Jothy snapped in reply, wrenching herself from Sundari’s grasp. Her nerves were on edge with all this anxiety. She felt old with the burden of the secret. “But I didn’t expect to go on being called a thief all this long time. What will happen when the man comes to repair the piano ? They’ll find it and ask who put it there, and I suppose you’ll say I did !” Jothy’s voice was bitter from her sad experience with friends. Sundari’s shoulders heaved.

“You wouldn’t be a Judas and betray your friend, would you ?” she whimpered. “I’d never tell on you !”

They were walking along a path through the leafy woods that covered a shoulder of a hill. The children ahead of them romped and ran about, picking nelli-

berries in the bushes. "Jambolams !" arose a shout from one side, and they all rushed to pick up the purple berries that carpeted the ground under a tall tree.

"Careful !" warned Matron Amma. "That purple color of jambolams is said to be very bad for the eyes."

No one spared her eyes, however. The ground was left as bare as if no fruit grew near it. Their path led through a mango grove, with new little trees like rows of reddish green balls, and spreading old trees that gave them cool shade from the slanting sunlight. They gathered many of the narrow, glossy leaves to take home for festoons, since the mangoes were long since gone. At last they reached the main goal of this walk—a pool hidden in the forest between two hills. On the dark breast of the water floated lotus, their immaculate petals tipped and centered with pink.

"My flower ! Padma, the lotus !" shouted every one of the five Padmas in the school. "Ours, too !" shouted all the six Kamalas. "The goddess Lakshmi's flower !" said one of the Hindu girls.

"Poor Lakshmi !" exclaimed someone, reminded of the goddess' namesake, and again many eyes turned in reproach upon Jothy. "Why can't you give back that belt ?" Krupa demanded irritably.

"The lotus is our India's flower," Matron Amma in

terposed, hastily changing the subject. "You mustn't wade in all that slippery slime, but we might be able to pull some to shore with a stick."

The golden afternoon was, for Jothy, splashed with the slime of their suspicion, just as were the creamy petals of the lotus blossoms which the children succeeded in getting. She left Sundari and walked home alone ahead of the rest, her mind in a seething tumult of bewilderment and helpless anger. She must not betray her friend: that was the one thing clear in all the muddle. She clung to that, oblivious today of the green bee-eaters, blue rollers, gay woodpeckers and other birds that flew in flashes of color from one bough to another of the spreading banyan trees.

They passed many Hindu families who were out walking in the forest, leaving their motor-cars or jutkas to wait by the main road. As she came around one turn, she caught a glimpse of Lakshmi with her brother-in-law and some children, her nieces and nephews, strolling along the path ahead of her. She started forward at sight of her friend, and then dropped back again, overcome by shyness. No doubt Lakshmi thought, too, that she was a thief, since the belt was still missing. Rather than risk rebuff, she merged in

the stream of chattering children which flowed around her, standing behind a bush when Lakshmi stopped to talk to them.

"We feel so ashamed that your belt was lost in our school," she heard Leela saying as she gave Lakshmi a lotus. "You must not judge our school by some of the girls in it."

Jothy's blood boiled at the smug tone of Leela's voice, and at the sight of Sundari stopping to chat as calmly as though she were completely innocent. She never turned her head to see whether Lakshmi even noticed her in the crowd. She began to feel ashamed, as if she really were the guilty one, and ran ahead again to reach the comparative oblivion of the school.

There was one good result of these difficult weeks; Jothy took refuge in her lessons and threw her whole self into them. Sundari, who never left her, shared her books and her wisdom with her to such good effect that Jothy soon stood at the head of Class Two every day. When the great week of term examinations came in September, she found it great fun to wait outdoors under a tree for her turn each morning and then be called into a room alone with a teacher — not her own teacher — to answer questions. One morning it was

the Missie asking, "What is this ? What is that ?" and "What do you do in the morning ?" and "Write 'hall' and 'way' and 'table,' " and such easy things as that.

Vimala Teacher called her into her room on the day that school closed for the ten days' Michaelmas holidays. "If there were not this doubt about you, Jothy, I am sure the Missie would promote you to Class Three after the holidays. You have done splendidly in everything. I never knew a girl from a village school to do so well !"

Jothy hung her head. She longed to go into Class Three with girls of her own age. Nynah and Amma would be so proud.

"Why don't you tell me all about it ?" coaxed Vimala Teacher. "Then you can have a happy holiday with no burden on your mind. You look so unhappy, Little One."

For a moment Jothy was on the point of blurting out the whole burdensome secret. She felt that she could not keep it to herself a moment longer. But just then Leela and two other girls bustled in with a brass chembu of coffee and some cakes for the teacher. Her heart hardened again at sight of Leela. She set her lips in a line, shook her head, and ran away.

Nearly all the girls rode gaily away in jutkas to catch

the train and go home or to nearby relatives for the holidays. Sundari was invited by her relatives, but she elected to stay with Jothy.

"That's very loyal of you, Sundari," Jothy overheard the Missie say, patting her on the head approvingly. "Perhaps you can persuade Jothy to make up her mind to confess."

"I wish I could persuade *you* to confess," said Jothy gloomily as she watched the Missie lock the school-building and depart for the holidays. Nothing could be done about that belt till school opened again.

Sundari looked up from a letter she was reading. "Listen, Jothy. This is from my father, written from Karumboor on the 18th."

"My family?" gasped Jothy. "They have not heard about this belt, have they? Has Lakshmi told them?"

"No, no!" Sundari replied crossly, beckoning to Jothy to sit beside her in the shade of the banyan tree. "You can't think of anything but that belt. Stop talking about it! Listen to what my father writes:

*The tassaldar has assigned to Jothy's uncle and two other young men plots of waste land to cultivate for themselves, and has promised to help us get a well in the Chery. When I come to Periyoor to see Mr.*



*Hoffman about a loan for the men to buy cattle, I shall come over to see you and Jothy at Jeyanoor. Your mother and I expect much of our children. Do nothing to disappoint us!*

"There, you see!"

Their compound was so silent and gloomy with most of the children gone that they walked over to the big girls' compound to find Jeeva Sister.

"What's all this I hear about you, Jothy?" the big girl demanded, the moment they set foot on the porch of the cottage where she lived.

"All lies!" muttered Jothy. "Sister, please show us the skeleton! We heard that you have a skeleton in your school!"

They walked slowly down the road between the big girls' cottages, where a bauhinia tree filled the air with fragrance, like a bouquet of pink flowers and twin leaves, and where wood-apples hung like tennis balls from high boughs and fell — *dopp!* — with every gust of the evening breeze. They cracked the woody rind with a stone and sucked out the acid pulp. The abandoned courtyard of the High School building was a bower of bloom. A great cassia spread its drooping branches like a tent in the center, with long black pods

hanging among pink blossoms. Frangipani flowers, upheld on bare branches, filled the air with sweetness. The girls were so busy gathering bouquets of frangipani and scarlet hibiscus for their hair, that they nearly forgot to go into the room where the skeleton stood,



grim and fearsome, in a dark corner. They wandered homeward in the sunset glow, happily sucking more wood-apples, forgetting their troubles until they passed an old hag on the road who peered at them as she passed and then turned back to shake her fist.

"The appam-woman — Leela's aunt !" whispered Sundari. "Don't say anything. She can bring the Evil Eye on people."

"What did you do with that belt ?" the woman was muttering in their faces. "I'll show you what you get if you make trouble for us !"

"Chee !" exclaimed Jothy bitterly, as the woman hobbled away, still muttering. "Leela pretends she comes of a grand family, just because she pays the full fees. Look at her relative !"

"Sh !" whispered Sundari in alarm, as they passed between the gate-posts and approached other children who were playing on the grass. "That's a secret. You mustn't tell. And you must not tell about the old woman's selling the things that Leela hides in the hedge. That's a secret too, and something bad will happen if you tell secrets."

Vacation passed happily with no further shadows. Matron Amma took them on walks every day, even down through the streets of the town and up on a hill where there was a distant view of Jeyanoor and the region around. Savitri's family invited them all to come with Savitri on a picnic, and sent two jutkas to take them to the point in the woods where they scrambled over a stone wall and followed a path through

dense undergrowth to a great flat rock. They stuffed themselves with pungent pagoda, twisted murukku, curd-cake and sweet, sticky je-lay-bi. That was a night when the full moon rose from behind a black hill like a great golden lotus. The children clapped and sang one kummi after another, and then played shadow-tag in wild excitement up and down the rocks in the white moonlight. Jothy suffered from such indigestion that night that the Matron took her down next morning to the big Mission Hospital which she had not seen yet. She wandered through the arched verandas looking at little boys and girls who lay on high beds under clean white sheets and gay quilts, imagining Raj as one of them.

"How is your brother?" the white-capped nurses inquired, when they learned who she was. "And your mother? We were so fond of them both. They helped us a lot. Your mother rocked and tended the orphan babies, and even the boy made swabs and dressings in bed! Such a plucky little fellow!"

A great lump came in Jothy's throat as she left them. She was living in such a different world that home had seemed very far away and unreal, until this conversation brought Amma and Raj vividly before her. Everyone didn't despise her people as that horrid Leela did.

She held her head higher as they walked back through the crowded bazaar street, Matron Amma a few paces ahead, as became one's elders, and Jothy, carrying a large medicine-bottle, behind her.

They paused in front of the grain bazaar where a fat merchant, a Chetty, with a sacred thread across his chest, weighed out measures of yellow unhusked rice and lentils and reddish millet. Women just like Amma walked through the streets with huge baskets of vegetables on their heads, which they spread out on sacks in the open market. Matron Amma called a bullock-jutka and loaded it full of brinjals and pumpkins and large white radishes for the children's curry. The bangle sellers were calling out to remind people to buy bangles for the coming Dusserah festival. Cloth merchants were beginning their brisk Dusserah trade.

After they had ridden a little way, Matron climbed down to buy several packages of fire-crackers for the children, for all kinds of fireworks are used to celebrate the Dusserah season. She bargained with a fruit seller who followed them along, and loaded into the cart enough squashy custard-apples for all the vacation family.

"Eat it now while the sun is hot," she urged Jothy,

handing her one. "You must not be eating these when the air gets cool, or they will give you a cold."

Jothy pulled the soft green fruit into two halves, and sucked out the white custard, spitting the black seeds out of the back of the cart. She felt so happy that she wanted to share her happiness with Nynah and Amma and Grannie and Raj and Baby and the Uncles and their families. She decided that she would write them a letter today, getting Jeeva Sister to help her. She had only sent post-cards thus far.

"Look !" said the Matron, breaking in upon her reverie. "That is the Reddy street, and that two-storey white house is Lakshmi's home."

Jothy leaned out of the back of the cart to see it. These high houses in Jeyanoor, whose roofs reached almost to the fronds of the palm trees, were a never-ceasing wonder to her. The square white tower of the Christian church and the carved black tower of the Hindu temple rose above both roofs and palms, as did the dome and minarets of the mosque.

"It's a great pity, Jothy," said the Matron severely, "that you still keep poor Lakshmi's belt hidden somewhere. I hear that Sundari's father is coming soon from your village. If you don't settle the matter be-

fore he comes, I shall tell him to inform your people of the way you have acted."

"No !" begged Jothy, letting her custard-apple fall in her dismay. "Please, Matron Amma, don't tell my people !"

The Matron pinched her cheeks. "Tell me how it was, silly child !" she begged, but Jothy shook her head mutely, with the tears falling.

"Then I shall certainly send word to your family," resumed Matron decisively.

No, Jothy reflected miserably as they rode on. She could not write that letter home — not yet.



### CHAPTER XIII

## *THE STONE-DROPPING DEMON HAUNTS JOTHY*

LEELA returned from the holidays with a whole crop of new stories. It was not at all bad to listen to them in the daylight. The first Saturday morning of the new term they begged for stories while they were out in the bathing-shed preparing "soap-nuts" to wash their hair.

"My aunt teaches in a school in a big city," Leela



informed them, letting one of the little girls crush her double-handful of soap-nuts for her with a stone, while she leaned lazily against the wall. "They were haunted by the yayval till they had to close the school. Not only did stones drop but other things happened."

"Tell us !" Stones paused in mid-air while the faces of all the small squatting pounders looked up in anticipation.

"If I tell you, you'll all scream and get us into trouble, as you did the other night, you 'fraid-cats !"

"No, no !" laughed the girls scornfully. Nothing seemed fearsome in the broad light of day. They threw their crushed handfuls of nuts into a bucket of water and stirred them to a soapy froth. "Tell us !"

"Well then," Leela's voice sank to a low, dramatic tone. "The yayval haunted one girl especially, on whom someone had cast an evil spell. All sorts of things happened to her — too dreadful for babies like you to hear. Sunday morning when she opened her locked box, her best Benares silk saree was *charred to ashes* in the very midst of unharmed sarees !"

No, they couldn't get a thrill up their spines at all to hear such things on a Saturday morning when the world was flooded with mellow sunlight and the zinnias were all a-bloom in Class Two's garden. Jothy

opened her box gingerly, however, when she ran up to the "Lotus Palace" to find her clean clothes, but her gingham was uncharred, if a trifle dirty. It was so hard to remember to put them on the dhoby pile at the right time. She ran back to take her place in the line of small brown bodies which now squatted along the edge of the shed rubbing their heads with the soap-nut suds which Leela poured up and down the line, followed by pot after pot of water. Jothy's hair was actually beginning to hang down a little in her neck, and it was coming in thick and black, as a result of the cool protection of cocoanut oil.

As they ran out to play in the sunlight while the big girls did their bathing in individual cubicles, it would have been impossible to prophesy that so perfect a Saturday could end in a night of horror. Gray clouds covered the face of the sun at times dropping a fine film of rain, through which the light shone almost immediately. "The jackal's wedding-day! The jackal's wedding-day!" shouted the children, every time this distilled sunshine beaded their hanging hair and made it curl, unoiled, about their faces. Jothy and Sundari and little Padma traced out houses for themselves in the white dust of the driveway, and played house all morning, cooking and serving feasts, holding weddings, and

building additional courtyards and gardens for their imaginary dwellings. Some of the more energetic children brought out the Matron's well-rope and practised skipping, jumping up and down singly and in groups with untiring zeal.

"After Dusserah comes Health Week," the veterans informed the new girls. "All the girls' day-schools in town have a big Field Day and the winners get silver cups. Last year our Dawn-of-Wisdom school got the cups for the junior relay-race and skipping. The Missie keeps our cups safely. We must practise and practise till we never miss once."

Jothy stopped her play to watch them with great admiration as the five best skippers stood in a line and ran through the turning rope one after another. No jump the first time, one jump each the second, then "One, two, three!" they counted excitedly the third time as each did her three jumps without stumbling, then "One, two, three, four!" until each had jumped up to six times. "Two minutes and a half," timed the Fifth Class teacher who stood by looking at her wrist-watch. "You must do much better than that!"

After time out at noon for food and various chores, they were out all over the compound again, playing a sort of "I spy." Jothy crouched with her group behind

the tecoma bushes as the searching-party raced past them with Krupa shouting the names of towns as secret signals to the hiders. "Madras !" she called warningly as they came out of hiding, and then "Periyoor ! Periyoor !" as a signal that they make a dash for home. It was wonderful fun to race through the sunlight, and lie gasping in the shade of the great banyan. They imitated all the bird-notes as they lay there cooling off—the brooding, caressing note of the wood-doves in the forest near by, the raucous caws of crows, the chatter of little green parrots, and the pathetic cry of the koil or Indian cuckoo which English people call the "brain-fever bird." "Koo-weel ! Koo-weel ! Koo-weel !" mimicked the children on ascending notes of the scale, until the Missie leaned out of a window and begged for mercy.

Even after dark there was no hint of terror to follow. There was no study-hour for the big children on Saturday nights so they formed a great circle in the courtyard after eating, and did every kummi they knew, the teachers joining in to their great delight. Krupa always led the kummis—joyous, animated little Krupa of Class Five, with her long pigtail swinging to the graceful sway of her body as her silver anklets jingled in perfect rhythm.

*Oh, what did you buy at the market, Lakshmi,  
Oh, what did you buy at the fair?  
I bought these bracelets of gold, Meenatchi,  
And a circlet of gold for my hair!*

They followed Krupa's words and actions as they sang. First they did the straight kummi, clapping on the off-beat, bending first into the circle and then away from it, bare feet in perfect time, Step-point, Step-point! They stopped, facing into the circle to jingle imaginary bracelets and weave imaginary flowers as these actions came into the song, swinging into the clap-clap rhythm again in perfect unison.

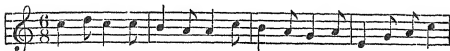
*Away beyond the cocoanut-grove  
I found lotus a-bloom in a pool,  
Roses and jasmines I wove into wreaths  
In the mango-shade so cool!*

As the song changed the rhythm quickened. They faced each other in the circle and clapped each other's hands, turning quickly from one neighbor to the other, swinging back into the original movement around the circle for the refrain:

*Mr. Moon, hold up your light,  
Look down, tonight,  
And see us playing!*

Refrain:

*Happy children in a ring  
So sweetly singing  
All together!*



Mr. Moon, hold up your light, Look down, tonight, And see us playing!



Hap-py children in a ring So sweetly sing-ing All to-gether!

*In the palace all is dark.  
The reason? Hark!  
A girl is born.*

Refrain:

*Happy children in a ring  
So sweetly singing  
All together!*

Krupa was a clever improviser. If anyone stepped into the courtyard, as the Missie did now, Krupa made up a stanza about her at once:

*Wearing blue and roses, too,  
Our Missie comes*

*To see her children !  
Face a-smiling,  
Spangles shining,  
Amma comes to see her children !*

They stopped in a burst of laughter to look at the Missie who was really beautiful tonight. Her arms and neck were white and bare. Silver spangles shone like stars against her blue dress when she held her lantern up to look at them, and pink roses from the garden bloomed at her left shoulder. This was a very different person from the every-day Missie in white, whose face was always dripping perspiration. She waved her lantern at them gaily as she made her way around the edge of the circle to speak to the Matron and then went out.

"She's going to dinner at the Judge's bungalow," said Leela, who always knew everything. "Her house-boy told me. There is to be a big feast for all the white people."

The children turned back to their game. "Let's finish with 'Shell, shell — What shell ?'" they clamored, and at once Krupa started the new rhythm. A similar play on words in English would be something as follows:

"*Shell, shell —*" called Krupa, as they all kept time

to the words with a step-hop and two claps of the hands.

"*What shell?*" shouted the children in reply, flinging their arms to the sides with two snaps of the fingers in time to the next step-hop. They kept on step-hopping around the circle in time to the questions and answers, their hands accenting the rhythm with their clap, clap, snap, snap, clap, clap, snap, snap !

Shell, shell —

What shell ?

Sea-shell.

What sea ?

Red Sea.

What red ?

Well-read.

What well ?

Oil-well . . .

They went on indefinitely, laughing at Krupa's answers, hopping and flinging out their arms faster and faster, then breaking ranks to chase each other madly about the yard.

It was in the confusion of this game of tag that Jothy felt something brush against her head and fall to the floor of the paved court. She thought nothing of it until later when it happened a second time, then she



stooped to see what had hit her. It was a stone. She looked about, but the children were bustling around now, spreading their mats on the verandas ready to lie down. A third stone hit her on the shoulder and bounced off to the ground. Jothy's exclamation brought a circle of girls around her to whom she exhibited her trophies. They crossed the courtyard to show them to the Matron who stood by the smoky wall-lamp. While they were talking to her a cry from the cement water-tank announced another stone. Sundari had been hit while getting herself a drink from the tap in the side of the tank. The children rushed under cover of the veranda roofs for stones seemed to fall everywhere in the open court. Some ran outdoors into the darkness to see if naughty boys were playing pranks, but there was no one to be seen outside. As the Matron crossed the court two more stones fell at her feet. Someone said "Yayval !" and the word passed from mouth to mouth. With every succeeding stone that fell — *dopp!* — in the open court, the chorus of moans and cries swelled to terrified wails. Matron Amma and the teachers waved their arms but no one could hear their words. The children huddled together in frightened groups as close to the inner walls as they could get, afraid both to come out into the open

court and to go back inside the dark dressing-rooms.

"Sing !" Matron Amma was heard to say finally. "If it is a devil, it will flee at the name of Jesus. Sing ! We shall send for the Missie."

How different this singing was from their gay songs of a half-hour ago. All the brightness of this Saturday was changed to black horror. Jothy and Sundari clung together as they sang, frantically, one hymn after another, scarcely pausing for breath between. True enough. While they sang, no more stones fell. When they paused after the fifth hymn, thinking it was all over, Jothy and Sundari ventured to dash across the courtyard with a group of others to reach the door of their "Lotus Palace." Of all that group, the stones singled out Jothy and Sundari, bouncing lightly off their heads. The tide of talk turned to a frightened roar.

As in a dream, Jothy felt herself drawn inside Matron Amma's room with Sundari. "It is the Yayval ! It is haunting Jothy and Sundari !" insisted the children. When would the Missie come ? Jothy felt that all devils would flee if she came in and said, "Nonsense !" in her imperious way. The evil spirits ran away from white people. That's why white people did not believe in them.

But this Yayval was not afraid of white people. The children's wails were hushed for a moment as they heard the click-click of shoes on the outside veranda. The outside door burst open and there stood two Missies in the doorway, holding up a lantern. Their own Missie was still in her blue, spangly dress. She must have been called away from the feast for she was frowning. The other stout Missie in black was laughing. She was the High School Missie—an old and powerful Missie from whom the devils would surely flee. The children released their pent-up breath in long sobbing sighs of relief as these deliverers crossed the courtyard to meet the Matron and stood talking to her in the danger-zone under the indifferent stars that shone so far away. Their laughter pealed out across the hushed building.

"Yayval?" said the little Missie, her merry voice making a jest of the word. "What perfect *non*—"

Before the word was even out of her mouth—*dopp!*—fell a stone at their very feet. Ah, then, as Jothy told her family later, they sank again into a sea of limitless fear! If this devil feared not even white people, it must be a terrible devil indeed. When the children saw the two Missies turn and run out of the

building as if pursued, they crowded into their dark dressing-rooms, stumbled over boxes and clung to one another in a nightmare of fear. The teachers tried to start hymns to quiet them. Presently the knock-kneed old waterman rushed in, followed by the Missie's house-boy, to talk to the Matron. The children stopped crying to hear what they said.

"The Missies are walking around and around the building in the dark !" the house-boy reported. "They think someone is throwing stones."

"They posted us out there to keep watch of one side," added the waterman, visibly trembling, "but — God help us ! This is not a matter of naughty boys !"

As the Missies' agitated steps were heard again in the entrance, the men stepped back hastily into a dressing-room where only the waterman's rolling eye-balls and the young fellow's turban were visible in the dark doorway.

"Is there a teacher or anyone," said the little Missie, mopping her face, "who is brave enough to come out and help us catch those naughty boys ? Just think what a lot of fun you are giving them ! I'm sure they can hear your screams all over town. Our *big, strong men* —" she added sarcastically, "have run away, and

we two can't see all four sides of this building at once."

Jothy wept afresh as she saw her beloved teacher step out into the black unknown with two others. Vimala Teacher was always the brave one, who killed the snakes and scorpions that crossed their path in the forest. Once she had chased a mad puppy that bit six children, the year before, and had thrown a towel over its head and captured it. But even Vimala Teacher trembled a little, as she came in to speak to the Matron a half-hour later.

"It *is* mysterious !" they heard her say. "The Missies are chasing a boy down the road, but I don't think he did anything. This is —"

Another stone fell just then, and the outcry drowned her words. When the Missies finally returned, panting and perspiring and covered with dust, they marshalled the children over to the school-building with their mats and lanterns, and put them to bed in rows on the floor of the assembly hall. With every window and door tightly shut and every lamp-wick turned high, they huddled together and finally slept. There were no more stones that night.

In the light of another golden morning it seemed like a bad dream. They talked in agitated groups while

they stood waiting at the Matron's door to receive their Sunday ration of cocoanut-oil in cupped palms to anoint their heads. Matron and the cooks had been up since the first cock-crow moulding and steaming their Sunday treat of white itli cakes. The children combed and braided each other's hair into glossy neatness, put on their "church" clothes and lined up according to height for the long march to church. Crows quarrelling in the tops of the flamboyer trees flung down scarlet blossoms for the pigtails of those who were not fortunate enough to have zinnias in their own garden.

Jothy felt light-hearted and happy again as she and Padma led the long procession down the highway, past creaking carts and under arching trees. The only consolation for being the smallest of the boarders was this privilege of leading the line to church, while Matron Amma walked behind with her umbrella up to keep off the sunlight. At the railway-crossing, their line came alongside of the line of big girls from the High School. They were proud of the sensation their story caused among the big sisters as they waited for the gates to open. When the train had passed, Jothy and Padma stepped out bravely into the main street of the town, picking a way through carts and herds of animals and

thronging people. Since the big girls had fallen in behind them, they were proudly conscious that they headed a very long procession. People came out on their porches to watch them file by; motor-buses and jutkas pulled up to make room.

The column was so long that as Jothy and Padma walked up the aisle of the cool, white church, the tallest High School girls were still opposite the bazaars and the Hindu temple. The little girls crowded together on the matting at the front and even moved up on the pulpit steps as more people pushed in behind. Devils seemed very far away when the drums and cymbals and violin beat out the rhythm of a familiar tune and the great chorus of people began to sing. From her seat on the steps Jothy did not look up at the white-robed pastor, but watched the people that filled every bench and every inch of floor-space in what she thought must be the biggest and most beautiful temple in all the world. There sat the Missies and the Doctor's wife among the women at one side, and the rows and rows of High School girls with the ends of their sarees drawn demurely over their heads, and the nurses and older women like a bed of zinnias behind them. The Doctor's bald white head shone conspicuously among the turbans on the men's side. His hand was on his

stubby gray beard and he was gazing quizzically at the little ones in front.

"No doubt he thinks the yayval is a joke, too," whispered Sundari to Jothy indignantly.

After the service people surged out to ask the children about the yayval. They dramatized the story with great gusto among the oleanders and the crotons of the trim little yard. The teachers could scarcely get them into line again for the march home.

On the way home that day, they had the luck to be held up for nearly half an hour by a procession that came from the Hindu temple. Squeezed into the crowd that lined the narrow street, they gazed with delight at the spectacle. Jothy had witnessed many processions in the Oor at home, but never such a grand one as this. There was an elephant with a scarlet cloth on its back and a man sitting on its head—the first elephant Jothy had ever seen. She fell into the gutter in her astonishment as it reached out its trunk, and was pulled out with muddy splotches on her clean skirt. But she did not notice that. Her eyes were fascinated by the dancing giants who followed the elephant—ugly grotesque creatures whose grinning faces were on a level with the tops of the houses. They whirled and twirled as they passed, upheld by tiny human legs,



frightening every baby in the crowd into paroxysms of crying. Jothy was frightened too, but the crowd laughed at her.



"Nothing but wicker frames covered with paper and carried by men," one good-natured man assured her. Jothy looked up at the leering faces and then turned to Leela.

"Does the yayval look like that?" she inquired, forgetting her "eternal hatred" for the moment. Since

the holidays the affair of the belt had not been mentioned and Leela had been quite friendly.

"Oh, much worse !" Leela assured her, with the voice of authority. "The yayval is black and much, much bigger."

Tom-toms and pipes deafened their ears and set their pulses pounding with their strangely stimulating rhythm. Rockets exploded at intervals of a minute. A hundred or more men staggered under the weight of the immense litter which bore the god who was being honored on that day, but the god was completely hidden by masses of flowers and festoons of leaves. Fat Brahmin priests stood on the litter, their naked bodies glistening with oil and streaked with sacred ashes, receiving offerings from the people.

Almost involuntarily Jothy put her palms together as the god was carried slowly past. Her heart beat with a renewal of terror. She watched a little girl of six who made her way boldly through the crowd and held up a brass tray of offerings to the nearest priest. He took the cocoanuts and broke them before the god, threw down the coins, the betel leaves and the chrysanthemums on the litter, lit the camphor on the tray and waved it before the god, muttering Sanskrit prayers, then handed it back to the

child. As the girl turned back, Jothy recognized her. She was Lakshmi's niece, Chandra, who had come with her to school one day. Jothy pushed forward to try to reach her. Chandra held her tray carefully, stopping to let others cup their hands about the sacred fire as they murmured prayers.

"Chandra !" called Jothy, reaching her at last. "Chandra ! Where's Lakshmi ?"

The child whirled around, took one look at Jothy and then drew back.

"Don't touch me !" she warned, looking at the crowd. "She's at home ! You thief !"

"I'm not a thief !" Jothy stamped her foot, unaware of the people who surged about them. "She gave me the belt !"

"My mother says," shrilled the child, above the thunder of drums and fireworks, "what can you expect of a low caste girl ? Why don't you bring back the belt ? Let me go !"

"What did she say ?" begged the other girls as Jothy made her way back to them, but Jothy shook her head. Her head ached with the noise and the burning noon-day heat. Her heart swelled almost to bursting under her pink silk jacket. "Come on !" she said, seizing Padma's hand roughly and pushing a way through

the crowd. "We're going !" she shouted back to the line of girls who still looked at the procession. "What are you staring at ?"

They went for a long ramble in the forest that afternoon with the Missie, and quite forgot the yayval as they clambered about like monkeys on a pile of rocks, or sat around the Missie listening to tales of her home across the sea where even ploughmen and ditch-diggers were white, as well as doctors and judges and teachers. They watched the sun go down in a last flare of crimson and orange behind the wooded hills while they sang the "Jothy" hymn, then scrambled down to walk home through the gathering darkness. One venturesome group that ran ahead came back screaming to cling to the Missie's skirts, but it turned out that the shadow that had scared them was a furry little mon-goose, not a devil ! They would not go on, however, until the Missie let them recite her "charm" against all evil influences — the words of Dahveedu, the shepherd-boy, when he was alone in the dark, ending, *I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me*. They felt better after that, and ran home shouting with laughter.

Jothy had just gone into the "Lotus Palace" to fetch her mat after supper, when she felt a tap on her head and a stone rolled on the floor at her feet. The other

children in the room stooped, at her cry, to find it in the dark. "A stone has fallen *indoors*!" they shouted, rushing out with the news. "A stone has hit Jothy *indoors*!"

Jothy followed them blindly, paralyzed by sudden renewal of all last night's terror. As she walked down the veranda, another stone hit her on the shoulder. Kanthy, who followed her, described it to the Matron in awe. "I was looking up at the roof as we came along the veranda. I saw that stone *form out of nothing* — yes, truly — and fall!"

Here was fresh horror. Trembling and moaning the girls gazed up at the cobwebby rafters, watching for stones to materialize. A sudden scream from the Matron's room set them all to shrieking again. The Matron herself had seen one. Forgetful of danger, the girls fought to get near and hear what the Matron was saying to the incredulous teachers, "This proves that they do not come from outdoors! I had just turned down the wick of my hanging-lamp, when I saw something *take shape out of nothing* and fall on this child's head."

"Send Jothy away!" came a swelling tide of appeal. "As long as she is here we shall be haunted."

Cowering in a corner, in a very nightmare of fright,

Jothy threw her skirt up over her head and longed for home. In Karumboor there was a clever exorcist who could cast out any sort of devil. She had seen him do it. If she could only get home to the safety of Amma's arms, Nynah would call the man and make him do it. But home was so far away ! If she set out, stones would fall from the roof of the train, from the trees on the road, from the thatch of the home hut. Hands were upon her suddenly. She felt herself hustled out to the porch and down the steps. She howled and held back but they pushed her along. A minute later she was blinking in the bright light of the Missie's bungalow, and the Missie was looking up with a frown from the open book she held under the glow of the light.

"What, *again* ?" she asked wearily, as Matron Amma poured out the tale. "But there is a policeman patrolling the compound tonight, and I thought everything would be all right !"

"Amma !" began the Matron firmly. "This is not a matter for the police —"

Just then there was a shout and a scuffle outside. They ran out to find the Doctor and the big Missie pulling a man along between them. He wore an old khaki shirt and ragged loin-cloth, and his turban was

coming down over one ear as he struggled to free himself.

"Here's your yayval!" shouted the Doctor. "We found him hiding in the bushes by the dormitory as we came in the back way."

"I am police!" shouted the enraged captive. "I am constable of Jeyanoor Police Force."

The little Missie fell back into her chair and covered her face. It appeared that she was laughing, not crying.

"Matron Amma!" she explained, after a long and hysterical colloquy with the others in English. "This is the policeman. I made him take off his beautiful uniform to disguise himself, so they mistook him for the stone-thrower!"

The policeman went away in a rage. The Matron set her mouth in a grim line as the white folks laughed some more.

"This is not a matter for the police," she repeated firmly. "The stones all hit this child. Explain that! I think it is a judgment upon her for never confessing the theft of the silver belt. Please keep her with you or send her away, so that we may have peace in the dormitory."

Jothy sobbed in a corner of the Missie's room after

the Matron left. "I didn't steal the belt!" she wailed. "I want to go home!"

They all went over to the dormitory together. Everyone was happy to see the Doctor. He was old, he was a man, he would know how to put things right. He carried a stout stick under his arm while he gravely examined the stones and the rafters and then went outdoors. Little by little the sobs subsided. The children stayed under the shelter of the veranda roofs but they sat down and faced toward the Doctor when at last he returned. He stood by the wall-lamp, tall and strong in his white suit, stroking his short beard as usual. The Missie, with her arm still around Jothy, leaned against the wall near by, and the big Missie sat at the edge of the veranda among the teachers.

"I have been all around the building," announced the Doctor, in his matter-of-fact voice. "I have beaten every bush and tree. There are no boys hiding there. These stones are not thrown from outside tonight."

A murmur of approval greeted these sensible words. Matron Amma sank down on a stool and leaned her gray head on her hand. The teachers looked at one another in puzzled amusement.

"These stones," continued the Doctor, holding one



up, "are not stones but pieces of brick. I should say that probably they come from that old brick-pile out back."

What did that matter ?

"Someone in this dormitory"—to emphasize his words the Doctor now shook his stick at the astonished children—"some one of *you* is throwing these stones !" As they sat motionless at this turn of the argument, he repeated it. "Stones are falling inside rooms. That means that a hand is throwing them, in the darkness and dim light—very cleverly, too. One of *you* ! Come now ! Confess ! Who has a grudge against poor little Jothy, that she should be hit six times ?"

Nothing more could be heard in the hubbub that arose. This time it was a hubbub of anger, not of fear. They were bitterly disappointed in the Doctor. Look at him, smiling ! Look at the teachers nodding their heads and laughing with the Missies ! Krupa's voice piped out boldly, and they paused to listen.

"Perhaps—" she called out boldly, "perhaps American girls do such tricks. Not Indian girls !" There the Matron stopped her with a hand over her mouth.

"Be still !" she commanded. "What use is it ?"

Even Matron Amma was angry at the Doctor as she ordered the children to spread their mats and lie down

quickly. In the surge of rage that swept over them, they forgot to go to the assembly hall. It was not till just as she was dropping off to sleep that Jothy opened her eyes again to see the teachers still talking earnestly with the Matron, and realized that not one single stone had fallen since the Doctor and the Missies had left. She heaved a great sigh of exhaustion and rolled over to press her face against the mat.

"How they will listen with mouths open when we tell this tale at home!" she murmured drowsily to Sundari.

Sundari did not reply. Her face was hidden in her arm — her body was still shaken by long, shuddering sobs which no one heeded.



#### CHAPTER XIV

### *JOTHY CELEBRATES DUSSEERAH WITH LAKSHMI*

THE NEXT morning at Assembly the Missie wanted the children to sing an English tune which she had taught them. She sat down suddenly in front of the piano, lifted up the cover and tried to play. Just as had happened before, there was a peculiar jangle of sound. Desperately Jothy hoped that she would lift the top, and she did.

"What *is* wrong with it ?" she exclaimed, and looked in.

In the excitement that followed when she drew out a flexible silver belt and held it up, no one noticed a child slip out of the door. Jothy's face was buried in her arms, as the murmurs swelled to a roar of talk about her.

"Stand up, Jothy, when your elders speak to you !" Teacher's voice said sharply in her ear. Jothy stood up and hung her head, overcome with embarrassment at the scores of surprised and curious eyes that were fixed upon her.

"Did you put it here ?" the Missie was saying sternly.

Jothy nodded, and then buried her face again, at the disappointed look in those blue eyes.

"I put it there to keep it safe," she muttered finally when they pressed her; then her overwrought nerves gave way and she wept aloud. As her teacher soothed her and held her, they looked up to see Matron Amma in the doorway, holding Sundari, who also wept.

"I was on my way over to ask if anyone had seen Leela," Matron Amma said to the Missie. Instantly there was a great craning of necks around the room. "Her plate of food is still untouched. Is she here ?"

No, Leela was not there. The children realized that

they had not seen her this morning. Each group thought she was with others. Even the little friend who had taken her plate to be filled, from force of habit, had set it down and forgotten all about Leela in the general excitement.

"As I was coming," the Matron resumed, "I caught sight of Sundari running out of the gate, and sent the waterman after her to bring her back."

"She has something to do with this," said the Missie, eyeing both girls with a frown of bewilderment. Presently both the sobbing suspects were led away to meditate in the solitude of the "Lotus Palace" while the Missie and the Matron and the waterman and house-boy set forth in search of Leela.

"When are you going to end this?" Jothy asked Sundari sullenly, in the dim light of their prison. "If Leela has run away, you need not be afraid of her. Why don't you tell them all about her?"

"Oh, Jothy!" gasped Sundari, almost strangled with sobs. "Oh, you won't tell, will you? They'll blame me for helping Leela—I know they will—and my father—my father is coming tomorrow—and he's—he's—such a strict man!"

Jothy humped her knees up to support her chin and stared gloomily at the peeling plaster on the wall, at

the line of tiny ants that scurried across the floor and disappeared in search of crumbs in someone's box, at the warped wood of the door which had been new when Sundari's mother's mother was a naughty school-girl here. She resigned herself stolidly to fate. Let come what would.

"Just see my little calves crying alone in the dark !" said a gay voice in the doorway, and Vimala Teacher came in, humming a tune and settling the hair-pins in her coil of hair. She took a mat down from the shelf, and pulled the children down on either side of her. "My two little calves !" she chanted soothingly, rocking them back and forth as their mothers did. "Crying for their mother-cow ! And did they hide the belt in the piano to keep it safe !"

"Where's Leela ?" Jothy inquired in a muffled voice, relaxing in Teacher's comforting embrace.

"Oh, she's gone home. I don't think we'll see her again."

"Gone home ?" Both girls sat up in surprise.

"Yes, the old appam-woman brought the Missie a message, but not till after she had searched the ten o'clock train, as she did once before —"

Jothy hid her face again as Teacher's laugh pealed out. Her burden was slipping slowly away.

"She went on the seven-thirty, and we never even missed her !" the Teacher was saying, in a dreamy sort of tone. "I wonder what she did with my fountain-pen. I never had one that wrote so well —"

"The appam-woman sold it !" blurted out Sundari before she thought, but Teacher expressed no surprise and only faint interest.

"And I wonder how much that belt would have brought ?" she mused.

"Enough for two pairs of ear-rings—" Sundari checked herself suddenly, caught Teacher's shrewd look, and flung herself on her lap in a burst of tears.

That was over, Jothy thought, rising and stretching herself with a sudden feeling of skittishness, while Sundari sobbed out the "secrets," one after another, in Teacher's arms. She bumped into the children who were listening at the keyhole as she ran joyously out into the sunshine. They stared at her with a kind of awe, and followed her to the school where other classes were making some pretense of lessons. The news percolated through the school in a few moments and every room was astir with discussion.

WHEN the teachers had coaxed the whole story out of Jothy they sent her across to the Missie's bungalow with

Kanthy and Krupa for support. Jothy paused on the threshold, suddenly overcome by embarrassment, while her escorts knocked over a chair in their excitement as they burst in upon the Missie, chattering in quite unintelligible confusion. She looked up from her endless writing with a frown and an impatient gesture which sent Jothy's heart into her mouth.

She wanted so very much to have the Missie smile at her again, as she had before the belt was lost. Would she be more angry than ever, now that she found out how Jothy had helped to keep the secret? When the Missie dismissed the other girls, and called Jothy to her side, her feet dragged unwillingly across the woolly carpet, and she covered her face with her hands to avoid the Missie's penetrating gaze, while she nodded mutely in response to her questions. She could not bear another word of blame. She stood poised for flight, peeking out between her fingers to chart a path for herself between the many chairs and tables of the long room, in case the Missie should scold.

But the Missie put her arm suddenly around Jothy's waist and squeezed her tightly to her side. "You poor, loyal little thing!" she murmured, and Jothy looked up in surprise to find that the blue eyes were brimming. "Was it necessary to suffer so much?"



"Sundari's father —" Jothy stammered, overcoming her shyness in an effort to bring complete understanding. "He's a very strict man. You won't tell him, will you ? He would be very angry."

"So that's it, is it ?" The Missie smiled and squeezed her again. "You can't prevent Sundari from suffering the consequences of what she did. Her father will be very sorry, of course, but he must know of it. You need not worry any more about Sundari. You have suffered quite enough for her already. As for Lakshmi's belt — forgive me, Little One, for doubting your word about that —"

It was embarrassing to have one's elders beg forgiveness in such humble fashion. It hurt and it healed, just as when one drew a cactus thorn out of a festering wound. Jothy felt comforted as she clung to the Missie and sobbed on her shoulder.

"It's all over," said the Missie in a shaky voice, as she patted her. "We'll forget all about it. Now, you know that if you will only tell me about your troubles, and not try to carry them all yourself, everything will come right. What shall we do with the belt ? How happy Lakshmi will be to see it ! Will you come with me this afternoon to take it back to her ? It's Dusserah festival, so I'll find out if they can receive us."

One thought was uppermost in Jothy's mind as she finally started to the door. She came back and started away again several times before she could get courage to say it.

"May I go into Class Three?" she stammered at last, hiding her face with shame at her own temerity. The Missie put her arm around her again.

"Indeed, you may! You know, Jothy, promotion after three months is a very rare honor in this school, and I only waited until I felt sure you deserved it—*in every way*," she added meaningly, as Jothy looked up smiling. The Missie made quite a little ceremony of it. She led Jothy with her slate and new books to the Third Class room and seated her at an empty desk—the real kind with a chair, not the baby-kind they had in Class Two.

"I'm sure Class Three will be proud to have Jothy as a member," said the Missie. "You girls who had a much better start than she did have not done nearly so well. We hope she will stand first in this class and every class and go on through High School."

The class clapped so hard at the Missie's little speech that the new member disappeared completely behind the raised cover of her new desk.

Poor Sundari had to face the Council of Five as soon

as afternoon school was over, but she did it bravely and took the consequences without a whimper. The empty sick-room was to be her prison for twenty-four hours of "solitary confinement." As she was led away, she took off her new blue glass bangles with gold specks in them and, by way of mute apology, pressed them upon Jothy, who stood sadly on the veranda.

The trees had never seemed so green nor the purple bougainvillea and crimson Rangoon creepers so vivid as they were when Jothy climbed into a hired pony-jutka with the Missie at five o'clock that afternoon, and set off down the road for Lakshmi's house. The Matron had had Jothy's blue skirt washed for her, and Padma had loaned her the blue beads to wear over her pink silk jacket. Kanthy had oiled and combed her hair for her, parting it jauntily on the side. Sundari's bangles tinkled on her wrists, and she held the silver belt firmly clutched in her fingers. The Missie sat stiffly on the floor of the jutka, bumping knees and elbows against the sides, and knocking her head, in its funny upturned basket of a hat, against the top whenever they jolted over an uneven place in the road. Jothy laughed at the jingling of the pony's bells, at the other jutkas they passed, at the beggar who whined for alms, and most of all at the Missie's bumps.

"You were not made to sit doubled up, Amma!" she giggled, leaving off the polite endings and using the familiar "thou" as she did to her own mother. She covered her careless mouth with her hand, appalled at her own lack of respect for elders. The Missie did not care. Her eyes crinkled at the corners as she pulled her pale green silk skirt down over her stiff knees.

"You children have no bones at all!" she remarked, looking with envy at Jothy, who was curled comfortably into a tiny space, and then her gaze fell upon the belt in Jothy's hand. "Now, mind!" she said severely, but her dancing eyes belied the tone of her voice, "no more using of my piano for a treasure-chest! And *no more secrets!*"

LAKSHMI ran to greet them at the great carved door of the house. For the first time Jothy entered Lakshmi's home by the front door. She stared in awe-struck admiration at her friend's brocaded cerise saree and the gleam of her diamond necklace. "Your wedding saree and jewels, Lakshmi!" she stammered.

Lakshmi nodded, then she put up a hand and wiped the tears carefully from her eyes. She took the belt from Jothy's outstretched hand with a little sob of

relief and a rueful, apologetic glance from under long lashes. That was all, but nothing more was needed. They followed the Missie into the large inner court, which was festooned and adorned for Dusserah. Lakshmi's dignified, kindly mother-in-law and her slightly aloof sister-in-law returned Jothy's *namaskaram* with their palms touching.

When little Chandra put a heavy garland of tiny white chrysanthemums and pink oleanders around the Missie's neck, she handed Jothy a little knot of them for her hair. They all laughed at Jothy's rueful expression. When she said timidly, "I've been on a pilgrimage to Tirupati!" they laughed again, and Lakshmi ran to fetch a piece of tinsel-tape which she tied like a snood around Jothy's cropped head with the flowers over her temples.

While the older people talked, Lakshmi took Jothy all over the house. They climbed the stairs to the second storey which had only one long room with a chair, table, bookcase, and bed—"my brother-in-law's room," Lakshmi explained—and a wide terraced roof. On the roof they lingered, looking at the other roofs and the towers of Jeyanoor and the wooded hills beyond, while they told one another of everything that had taken place since they parted.

"You must come tomorrow," Jothy urged, "for the teacher is coming from Karumboor and he will have news of home."

"I cannot come tomorrow," Lakshmi said, "not till the Nine Nights of this festival are ended. Ask the Karumboor teacher to come and see me, will you? I hope—oh, I hope—that they will let me return to classes after the festival. I hate studying alone with a private teacher."

A single voice was raised suddenly in a long-drawn call.

"What is that?" Jothy inquired, looking around with a start.

Lakshmi laughed. "The Mohammedan mosque is quite close to us. See! That is the call to prayer at sunset."

Jothy saw a figure moving in one of the four slender minarets that rose above the dome of the mosque near by. They ran to the other side of the roof to look down at a Mohammedan neighbor saying his prayers on his prayer-mat, rising and kneeling and knocking his forehead against the ground. Then they went down the stairs again, where their elders were still talking.

"She seems a modest, well-mannered child," Jothy

heard the older woman say to the Missie as they passed, and realized with a little thrill of joy that they were talking about her.

"That is God's house," said Lakshmi, pointing into a doorway opposite the pedestal of the sacred tulsi, where lights burned in a tall brass lampstand before a shrine. "And look at our doll display, Jothy. Come and look!"

One of the open rooms that faced the court was filled with a sort of improvised staircase on which rose tier upon tier of china dolls, painted wooden dolls, little animals and images of sandalwood, ivory, brass and bronze. Jothy gazed at them in ecstasy, as Chandra and Lakshmi picked up one after another to show her and let her hold. At the very top stood a beautiful foreign doll with yellow hair and eyes that opened and closed.

"*He* sent it from over-the-sea!" Lakshmi told her, taking it down to display its various charms. "We have the dolls out for the Nine Nights of Dusserah," she explained, "and then we put them away in chests again till next year. But I shall keep this one and bring it to school sometimes."

"Oh, *will* you, Lakshmi?" said Jothy rapturously, cradling it in her arms a moment and then handing it

back. "Of course !" she remembered suddenly. "Dusseerah is the festival when everyone worships his tools ! My father used to worship his plough, the potter his wheel, the blacksmith his forge—" She fell silent, wondering what they were doing this year.

"See !" said little Chandra, pulling her along to a sort of improvised shrine with lights and flowers. "There are my father's big books, my brother's pen, my mother's cooking-pots !"

When the Missie rose to go, her hostesses would not hear of it.

"You cannot leave us without sharing some of our festival sweetmeats !" they declared. "Hospitable ? It is not only our duty but our great joy to entertain our friends, especially at this time."

Lakshmi, Jothy and Chandra watched the Missie with great glee from across the court, as she sat at the table and tried to eat fried wheat-cakes with hot sauce, curd-cakes and sticky je-lay-bi with the fingers of her right hand, sitting firmly on her left hand so that she might not forget herself and use it. She tried very hard, but she was very awkward. Even Chandra's two-year-old brother, who toddled about in a bright red coat, could put the food in his mouth more gracefully than Miss Lang. When she tried to pour coffee



into her mouth without touching the brass tumbler to her lips, she had such a hard time that the ladies begged her to drink it in her own way.

"I understand that the English put their lips to anything," whispered Lakshmi with disgust, "even to postage-stamps. Sit down, Jothy! You must eat a little of everything, too."

When Jothy sat, completely gorged, on a mat near the Missie's chair, a number of guests arrived, decked out in festival flowers, jewels and silks, and Lakshmi played the veena for them. She sat cross-legged on a mat in front of the instrument, which is something like a giant mandolin or guitar. She took the pumpkin-shaped support of the handle into her silken lap and twanged the strings to make a harp-like accompaniment to her song. Her sister-in-law took her place in a few minutes and entranced them all with the melodies she drew from the sweet-toned strings.

"I am taking lessons every afternoon," Lakshmi whispered. "I hope I can play as well as my sister-in-law some day. Chandra is starting the violin."

When a troop of little girls came in from neighbors' houses to see Lakshmi's and Chandra's doll display and compare it with their own, the older Reddy lady suggested a kolartum, or stick-dance, which is very much

like kummi except that, instead of clapping, the girls hold a little stick in each hand which they strike together to beat time to the rhythm. When the girls stood in two lines facing one another for the first figure of the kolartum, there were just seven of them.

"You need one more!" said the Reddy lady. "Do you know how to do it, Little One?" she asked, turning to Jothy. Jothy did, for they often played kolartum in Class Two. She accepted the two gaily-painted sticks shyly and took her place among the beautiful caste children. Lakshmi began an entrancing song about the god, Krishna; how he played with the milkmaids and hid their clothes while they bathed. The eight girls struck their sticks against each other's sticks in perfect time or held them up to make an arch for others to march under. The lines merged into squares, the squares into concentric circles, the circles back into parallel lines again without a false beat. Jothy giggled joyously with the rest as they threw down their sticks and ran off to see the dolls. The visitors went on to the next house, and the Missie rose to leave.

"When the Nine Nights of the festival are ended," promised the Reddy lady, "Lakshmi will return to school. So you kept the belt safe, Little One?" she added, turning to Jothy, who was speechless with this

accumulation of bliss. "That other one was a bad girl. I am glad you are not like her. You and Lakshmi must study well. Go and come again !" she urged, accompanying them to the great front door, and putting her hands together in the parting greeting.

The streets were full of twinkling lights in niches beside open doorways. Groups of gaily-dressed women and girls went in and out of the houses to make visits. Every doorstep was decorated with beautiful kolam patterns. Boys set off fire-crackers — pop-pop ! — bang-bang !

"Oh !" breathed Jothy, as they rode off in Mr. Gopal Reddy's motor-car. "If only Sundari could have seen it all, too !"

Poor Sundari found the interview with her father, next day, far more of an ordeal than her punishment had been. Jothy was glad she did not have to face the Karumboor teacher's set and sorrowful face. She waited with Jeeva Sister on the dormitory veranda, trying meanwhile to compose a letter for him to take back.

*To the dear and honored parents whom God has given me in His boundless grace, your obedient and*

*loving daughter, Jothy, sends greeting. I am well by God's grace. I hope you are the same.*

She had written this much in straggling letters on a paper, with the help of Jeeva Sister, and could not get any farther. She looked helplessly at the playground where the children skipped rope and hopped and ran and shouted under the great trees whose scent filled the air. Her brain was still trying to marshal in some sort of words the joys of fire-crackers and dolls, je-lay-bi and kolartum, promotion, and all the rest. There was no end to it. She chewed the end of her pencil, and finally gave up entirely. *Thus, your loving child, Jothy*, she scrawled and folded the paper.

When the Karumboor teacher came out, he and Sundari looked happy and reunited once more. He pinched Jothy's cheeks as he took her letter and put it in the pocket of his new black coat. Sundari was chattering the story of the yayval with only an occasional catch in her voice.

"The Missie says it must have been that Leela," Jeeva began, but the girls were so shocked at the suggestion that she hastily changed the subject. "Did you hear that our Jothy was promoted?"

The teacher looked at Jothy with pride in his eyes as he pinched her cheeks again. "Wait till I take that news to your family !"

"Oh, tell us about Young Uncle's land !" she begged. "And the new well—and what did my Amma say about me ?"

"She said, 'Tell my Little One that I am longing to cool my eyes with a sight of her !' And your brother told me to tell you that he drove the master to the station in the best cart and drove back all alone. The baby has sore eyes. Every child in the village has sore eyes, but I am taking back a lot of eye-drops from the hospital. Your Nynah says you are to study hard, and he will send you train-fare in time to follow Jeeva when she comes home for Christmas—"

"Tell the school-children," interrupted Jothy, "that I am learning a lot of new songs to teach them when I come. We can sing them for Christmas."

"Oh, we'll act a drama this year !" insisted Sundari. They stood around the teacher who sat on the bench at one side of the dormitory veranda, oblivious to all the noise around them.

"The new well will be ready by the time you come," the teacher went on, "so you can always be as clean as you are now ! Your uncle ? He and his family —"

even Pushpa-raj — are working industriously to make something of the new piece of land. I fear they will have a very hard time until the first crop —”

“Are they hungry ?” asked Jothy, as a shadow fell across her happiness. “Is there work for my father this year ? Did the Rains fall ?”

They paused in their conversation as the bell rang and the hungry hordes pounded up the steps and into the doorway.

“We are hoping for good rains,” said the teacher gravely.

“Teacher,” said Jothy, twisting a corner of her red jacket, “Teacher, is Karumboor just a jungle-place, as Sundari says ?”

“I only meant a place full of — well, of prickly-pear and useless things like that,” Sundari defended herself hotly on what was now the only sore point between herself and her friend.

“Useless ?” said her father. “You call cactus useless, child ? Of course, it has thorns, but only to protect itself. What should we do without cactus to protect our property ?”

“And are my people just jungle people ?” persisted Jothy, determined to settle this point once and for all, though Jeeva might smile.

"Well," said the teacher slowly, as silence and violet shadows enwrapped them and lent impressiveness to his every word, "I often think your people — *our* people — Jeeva's and yours and mine — are something like the cactus. No one ever treads the yatttham to water the cactus, yet it manages to grow in the driest wilderness, and even puts out yellow blossoms, which are as lovely as roses, and purple fruit for the hungry — I must go !" He collected himself with an effort and rose. "What messages shall I take to your mothers ?"

"Tell Amma to send me some more murukku and a jar of her lime-pickle to eat with the spiceless curry they give us here," said Sundari, as they followed her father to the gate.

"Tell my people I have a job for next year, to teach in Periyoor," said Jeeva, adding wistfully, "I'll be glad to help them but I do wish I could have finished High School !"

"Jothy ?" said the teacher, pausing as he left them.

Jothy almost tied herself into knots with the effort for expression.

"Tell them," she struggled, "tell them I long to cool my eyes with the sight of them. Tell them I'm glad that I'm just a jungle child !"

# WORDS WHICH MAY PUZZLE THE READER

aiyo	i'-oh	alas
Amma	Ah-ma'	mother
appam	ah'-pum	rice cake
Avvai	Of-vie	poetess
brinjal	brin'jal	eggplant
Chandra	Chun'-dra	a girl's name
chery	chair'-y	outcaste village
Chetty	Chet-ty	a high caste man
chilis	chil'-is	pepper
Dahsinga	Dah-sing'-u	
Dahveedu	Dah'-vee-du	David
dhoby	do'-by	washerman
Dusserah	Doos'-se-ra	a festival
Gopal	Go'-pal	
Govinda	Go-vin'-da	
half-coolie		women and boys who receive half a man's wages
		monkey-god
Hanuman	Ha'-noo-man	
Jeeva	Jee'va	
je-lay-bi	je-lay'-bi	syrup cake
Jeyanoor	Jay'-a-noor	name means town of victory
Jothy	Jo'-thy	a poetical word mean- ing light
Kamala	Ku'-ma-la	a girl's name meaning lotus



Kanthy	Kan'-thy	
Karumboor	Ka'rum-boor	village of sugar-cane
koil	ko'-weel	Indian cuckoo
kolartum	ko-lar'-tum	stick-dance
Krishna	Krish'-na	
Krupa	Kru'-pa	
kummi	kum'-mi	a dance
Lakshmi	Lash'-mi	
mooram	moor'-am	a flat basket or tray made of palm leaves
Mottai	Mot'-tai	bald-head
Murugan	Moo'-roo-gun	
namaskaram	na'-mus-kah'- rum	a greeting
Nynah	Ni'-na	Daddy
paddy	pad'-dy	green growing rice
Padma	Pad'-ma	lotus
Padmini	Pad-mi'-ni	
pandal	pund'-dahl	pavilion
pariah	pa'-ree-ya	out-caste
Parvati	Par-va'-ti	
Perumal	Per'-oo-mal	
Periyoor	Pe'-ri-oor	
Pongal	Pung'-al	India's harvest thanks- giving
poochie	pooch'-ie	Tamil word for any sort of bug or insect or creeping thing
Poopathy	Poo'-pa-thy	a girl's name meaning flower
Poytavaroom	Poy'-too-vah'- room	Go and come again !
Pushpa-raj	Push'-pa-raj	king of flowers

Rama	Rah'-ma	a man's name
Ranebai	Ran'-e-bi	
Rishis	Ri'-shi	ancient wise men
saree	sa'-ree	cloth used as a garment
Secta	See'-tah	a goddess
Shabash	Sha-bash'	bravo !
Senji	Gin'-gee	
Sundari	Soon'-da-ree	a girl's name meaning beauty
Tamil	Tam'-il	an ancient language; the word means sweetness
veena	vee'-nah	a musical instrument
Vimala	Vi-mah'-la	
yayttham	yat'-them, pronounce to rhyme with "hate them"	well-sweep
Yovahn	Yo'-vahn	John